



A COMPANION TO
SPORT AND SPECTACLE
IN GREEK AND
ROMAN ANTIQUITY

EDITED BY PAUL CHRISTESEN
AND DONALD G. KYLE



WILEY Blackwell

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Acknowledgments

We would like to express our profound gratitude to our international team of over 30 contributors from some 10 countries for combining authoritative scholarship and innovative insights in their essays. We appreciate their efforts to sustain the volume's emphasis on social history and the social and cultural significance of sport and spectacle.

The coeditors also wish to thank Haze Humbert of Wiley-Blackwell Publishing for encouraging this project and allowing us to define and pursue our own approach to the subject. Thanks are also due to Ben Thatcher, Felicity Marsh, and David Adams at Wiley-Blackwell for their help in the publication process, and to Teddy Henderson and Sophia Vazquez of Dartmouth College for their invaluable assistance at every stage of the project.

The endless patience and support of our spouses, Cecilia and Adeline, during the time we worked on this volume, and in all the years before, merits more appreciation than can be easily expressed in words.

Finally, while this project was in progress, the study of ancient Greek sport, and of Pindar and the early years of the modern Olympics, lost a great champion in David C. Young (1937–2013). A consummate scholar of great intellect, passion, and generosity, David energized the study of ancient Greek sport by challenging traditional illusions and biases. His *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics* (1984) made scholars rethink the social status of Greek athletes, igniting a debate that is still active today, as this *Companion* shows. For his many and major contributions to our understanding of ancient sport, we gratefully dedicate this volume to David C. Young.

Paul Christesen
Donald Kyle
April 26, 2013

General Introduction

Paul Christesen and Donald G. Kyle

This *Companion* draws on the expertise of three dozen scholars to provide a wide-ranging survey of the latest thinking about and evidence for sport and spectacle in Greek and Roman antiquity. All of the essays are intended to be accessible to a wide audience, ranging from scholars who study other aspects of Classical antiquity to people outside of academia with a serious interest in the ancient world. The *Companion* also seeks to advance the study of ancient sport and spectacle by emphasizing the need to understand sport and spectacle not as isolated activities but as part of a broader social canvas. The number of new and striking insights found in this volume is a testament to the promise of this approach, which we define in the discussion that follows as writing the social history of sport and spectacle. Even those with a thorough grounding in the study of ancient sport and spectacle are, as a result, likely to find much here that is worthy of close attention.

1 Definitions, Parameters

This work applies the terms “sport,” “athletics,” and “spectacle” to public, physical, especially competitive, performances (contests, combats, etc.). It is helpful to define all of these terms with some precision because what properly constitutes sport, athletics, or spectacle is a contested issue (Holowchak 2002: 7–98; Kyle 2007: 9–11; Scanlon 2002: 7–9).

Derived from *disporter* (to carry away) in Old French, “sport” is an inclusive term that is used as a general rubric applied to activities ranging from play, pastimes, and physical education to intense professional athletics. “Sport” is a singular, collective term for a phenomenon; “sports” are individual activities that fall under the collective heading.

An important distinction is that between “sport” and “athletics.” The latter is derived from the Greek words *athlos* (a contest for a prize) and *athletes* (athlete). “Sport” and “athletics” are sometimes

used interchangeably, but in this volume athletics is understood as a subset of sport that involves public, formally organized competitions, typically with prizes for successful competitors. One small but important nuance is that the distinction between sport and athletics does not carry over to the relevant adjectives, so, for instance, “athletic events” include both competitive and noncompetitive forms of physical activity. Furthermore, “athlete” designates anyone participating in either sport or athletics.

“Spectacle,” from the Latin *spectaculum*, can be more easily defined, as a public performance (e.g., chariot race) with an audience. Recent scholarship has suggested that the traditional lines drawn between Greek sport and Roman spectacle need to be reconsidered. It was long standard to differentiate between Greek sport, which was habitually portrayed in a strongly positive light, and Roman spectacle, which was frequently portrayed as a degenerate and degenerating activity (see, for example, Gardiner 1930: 118–19). More recent work, however, has emphasized that audiences were a key element of Greek sport and that the most notorious of Roman spectacles, gladiatorial combats, involved rule-governed duels between well-matched individuals that were fought in the presence of referees and that did not typically end in death. At least some gladiators in the eastern part of the Roman Empire understood themselves as athletes, and some scholars now argue that gladiatorial combat should in fact be understood as a sport (for further discussion of this point, see CHAPTER 42).

It is, therefore, important to be cautious about making stark distinctions between Greek sport and Roman spectacle, while also acknowledging important differences between Greek and Roman practices. Some Roman spectacles, such as public executions, cannot be reasonably interpreted as a form of sport. High-status individuals in the Greek world were expected to participate in sport, whereas the participation of high-status Romans as performers in spectacles met with strong opposition (Edwards 1997). And although, after centuries of mutual exposure, Greeks came to support Roman spectacles, and Romans came to accept Greek sport, Greeks never abandoned their primary enthusiasm for sport, and Romans maintained their predilection for violent spectacles.

2 The Development of the Field

Over the last 40 years the study of ancient sport and spectacle has grown and matured into a thriving and dynamic subdiscipline of

ancient studies. Increased interest in ancient sport and spectacle has inspired a stream of articles and books intended for both scholarly and general audiences. The European journal *Nikephoros* is completely devoted to research on ancient sport, the *Journal of Sport History* (30.2 (2003)) and the *International Journal of the History of Sport* (26.2 (2009)) have published special issues on ancient sport and spectacle, and numerous scholarly monographs on those subjects appear each year. Works written for a general audience include dozens of accounts of the ancient Olympics (e.g., Spivey 2012) and Roman spectacles (e.g., Dunkle 2008), sourcebooks (e.g., Miller 2004; Futrell 2006), and reference aids (e.g., Golden 2004).

Research continues to provide exciting new insights. Recent discoveries include a series of poems on athletic themes by Posidippos of Pella, gladiatorial burials at Ephesos and York, and Hadrian's letters from Alexandria Troas on athletes and festivals. Inspired by European scholarship (e.g., Weiler 1988), recent works have expanded their chronological and geographical scope, incorporated comparative material, and suggested similarities as well as contrasts between Greek and Roman physical performances.

While the field has grown, scholars have until quite recently tended to analyze ancient sport and spectacle without paying much attention to the societal context in which these activities took place. The traditional focus was on issues such as the precise sequence of events at the ancient Olympics or the seating arrangements in the Colosseum. That approach – what might be called “sports history” or “event-oriented sport history” – was reasonable, indeed necessary, when our knowledge of ancient sport and spectacle was limited. However, most of the relevant body of evidence, which increases significantly but slowly, has now been thoroughly studied, and continued work on well-known sources along established lines already brings diminishing returns.

What we have learned over these 40 years has made it possible to ask new, bigger questions about the relationship between sport and spectacle on the one hand and society on the other. We are now, for example, in a position to take what we know about the involvement of Greek colonists in the Olympics and to think about how sport helped Greeks who settled overseas, in places such as Egypt or Sicily, maintain a sense of cultural identity while living far from mainland Greece (innovative works along these lines include König 2005 and the essays in Hornblower and Morgan 2007). Increasingly sophisticated scholarship is looking at the significance of Rome's varied program of entertainments – from the shows of the arena and circus to the acceptance and patronage of Greek athletics – for the ethnicity and self-representation of performers and spectators, as well

as the sociopolitical dynamics of shows for elites and emperors (e.g., Beacham 1999; Fagan 2011). Such approaches, which might be described as writing a social history of sport and spectacle, have become increasingly common in the last decade and will likely dominate the field in the years ahead.

For anyone interested in ancient sport and spectacle, the continually expanding collection of relevant scholarship presents both opportunities and challenges. We know much more about ancient sport and spectacle than we did 40 years ago, and we now have conceptual and theoretical approaches to study these subjects with increasing depth and sophistication.

However, the sheer quantity of the available secondary literature on ancient sport and spectacle makes it functionally impossible for nonspecialists to stay up with the field. Moreover, the continuing, rapid development of the field means that the scholarly consensus about such basic issues as when the Olympic Games began or where the first Roman amphitheaters were built has shifted significantly in the past decade.

3 The Aims and Design of This *Companion*

There is, therefore, a need for a guide to what has become a large and complicated field of study, and our hope is that this *Companion* will fill that need. That said, we did not ask the contributors to this volume to limit themselves to summarizing what is already known about ancient sport and spectacle. Rather, we saw this an opportune moment to ask a mix of scholars, including some of the most established figures in the field and those just embarking on their careers, to think about ancient sport and spectacle from a social historical perspective.

The essays in this volume focus on the societal context in which various activities took place and delve into the relationships between sport and spectacle and between those activities and Greek and Roman society. Sporting discourse included contestation, negotiation, and acculturation, so chapters herein often integrate insights and models from the sociology of sport, New Historicism, etc. to interpret sport and spectacle as cultural performances and as communicative systems of meaning that both reflected and affected social values.

In carrying out this program of study, it was essential to move beyond the frequent but problematic tendency to concentrate on the

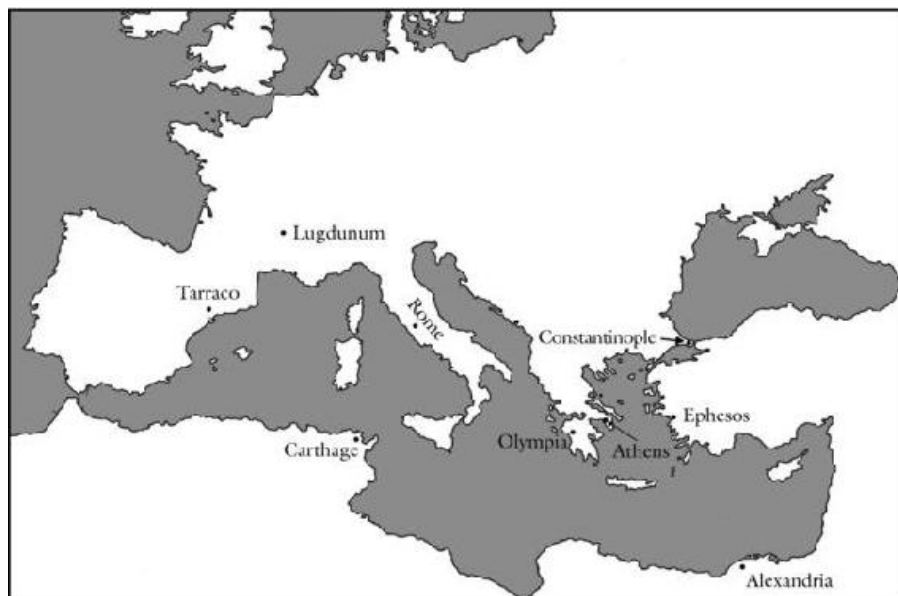
ancient Greeks' Olympics and on the Romans' gladiatorial combats. The ancient Olympics, while illustrious, are problematic for social historical investigation. We know the names of about 25% of the athletes who won a victory at the ancient Olympics (Farrington 1997: 24), but in most cases we know next to nothing about those athletes. Nevertheless there have been determined efforts to distinguish athletes by social class, as examples of aristocratic privilege, or of upward social mobility from nonelite families (e.g., Young 1984: 107–70; Pleket 1992). The results of all such work are vitiated by the paucity of relevant evidence; we do not know even the names of the vast majority of the athletes who competed at the ancient Olympics, since only the names of victors were recorded. Moreover, the Olympics took place only every four years and included no more than roughly 200 athletes (Crowther 2004: 171–82). This means that even if we knew a great deal about every athlete who competed in the ancient Olympics, it would tell us relatively little about the vast majority of sport participants in ancient Greece, who, by definition, did not compete at elite levels.

In order to write a social history of Greek sport it is necessary to expand our focus beyond Olympia and take into consideration other sites, large and small, and to shift emphasis from individual heroes and feats to groups or classes and social dynamics. Most Greek athletes and spectators experienced sport in their own local festivals, stadia, and *gymnasia* throughout each year, and those experiences were a key part of Greek social, political, economic, and urban history.

This *Companion* thus includes essays on a wide range of sites and subjects relating to Greek sport. Geographical coverage is intentionally broad; contributions in this volume explore sport in a variety of sites and regions in the Greek world, including Athens, Sparta, the northern Peloponnese, the Greek West, Macedonia, Egypt, and Asia Minor (see [Map 0.1](#) for some of the key locations covered in this volume). Other contributions consider important dimensions of sport such as its connection to democratization, education, gender, and religion.

Although this volume is not dominated by the ancient Olympics, Donald G. Kyle's essay on athletic competitions (Chapter 1) and Thomas Heine Nielsen's essay on Olympia and Hellenic culture (CHAPTER 8) highlight the importance of Olympia, which of course influenced other (especially Panhellenic) games in terms of events, procedures, and prizes. Abundant references to the ancient Olympics are also dispersed throughout other essays, for example in Nigel Nicholson's discussion of Pindar's odes for athletic victors (CHAPTER 4) and in Winthrop Lindsay Adams's exploration of sport in Macedonia (CHAPTER 22).

Map 0.1 Some major sites associated with Greek and Roman sport and spectacle.



Just as works on ancient sport tend to concentrate to an excessive degree on the Olympics, works on Roman spectacles often fixate on gladiatorial combat. Gladiators were the “stars” of the arena, but there was much more to Roman spectacle than gladiatorial combats. Chariot races drew the largest crowds at Rome, beast hunts were popular, and Romans came to accept Greek athletics as a subsidiary but nonetheless important form of entertainment. This *Companion* thus includes essays on a variety of different forms of Roman spectacle, as well as on sites at which Roman spectacles were held. It also looks at religious elements in and critics of Roman spectacle, people other than performers who played an important role in staging spectacles, and the relationship between spectacle and Romanization.

All books have emphases and limitations. This *Companion* concentrates on activities with a strong element of physical performance and does not explore all forms of ancient spectacle. More specifically, dramatic and musical performances and the Roman triumph are not discussed in detail. This is not meant to minimize their importance but to help ensure commensurability between the activities considered in the various essays and thus facilitate comparison and contrast between the roles played by sport and spectacle in the Greek and Roman worlds.

Investigations of ties or parallels between the ancient and modern Olympics, when academic and not ideological, are joining a fashionable trend in cultural history to reception studies. Such works

examine how later and contemporary cultures receive, perceive, and represent the cultures of earlier times. The study of the modern reception of ancient sport and the ancient body is a burgeoning field (see, for example, Kitroeff 2004; Goff and Simpson 2011; and Fournaraki and Papakonstantinou 2011) but is not included in this volume.

4 Organizational Structure: Sections, Parts, and Chapters

After this introduction, the volume falls in into two broad sections, one on Greece and another on Rome. Each section has four parts, with some rough parallelism between Greek and Roman essays. Part I of Section I begins with an introductory essay that provides an overview of sport and spectacle in the Greek world, Part I of Section II with a comparable essay focused on the Roman world. The remainder of Part I in both Sections I and II provide essential background information, including essays on the early history of sport and spectacle in the Greek and Roman world, respectively, as well as on the relevant literary, artistic, and material evidence, and recent scholarship. Parts II and III of Section I and Section II look at the places, performances, and people of Greek and Roman sport and spectacle. Essays in both sections contextualize the activities, settings, performers, and spectators with attention to issues such as class, gender, religion, and ethnicity. Part IV of both sections contain essays on the later ages of Greek and Roman sport and spectacle.

All chapters in this volume are similarly organized; the text of each essay is followed by a list of abbreviations (if any) used in that essay, references, and a brief guide to further reading that directs readers to relevant general and scholarly works. Readers looking for introductions to Greek sport and Roman spectacle are encouraged to begin with essays in this volume by Donald G. Kyle (Chapter 1) and Roger Dunkle (CHAPTER 25) and the references cited therein.

Greek names have been transliterated in such a way as to be as faithful as possible to original spellings while taking into account established usages for well-known people and places. It is, unfortunately, impossible to achieve complete consistency in transliterating the names of people, places, authors, and works without detaching oneself completely from earlier conventions or ruthlessly Latinizing all Greek names and words.

Some readers may also find it helpful to start with a clearer sense

of the contents of each of the 43 essays that make up the remainder of this volume. Kyle's Chapter 1 surveys basic background information – the actions, events, and settings – of Greek athletics. It answers standard questions such as: What competitions took place, not just in the Panhellenic games but also in local festivals? How were athletic festivals organized, who were the officials, and what were the rules and regulations? Who could compete? This essay is intended to provide a basic grounding for readers so they can better concentrate on social history in other parts of the volume.

In Chapter 2, Jeremy Rutter confronts the daunting evidentiary challenges involved in exploring (pre-Greek) Minoan and (early Greek) Mycenaean Bronze Age sport. His detailed treatment shows that sporting performances had social, spectator, violent, and ethnic variations – and political significance – from their earliest appearance. Among his many interesting suggestions are that Mycenaean depictions of bull sports on vases and wall paintings were intended solely for royal consumption and that, whereas boxers in Minoan Crete were probably members of high-status families, boxers in Mycenaean centers on the mainland were servile hirelings.

Timothy P. J. Perry's Chapter 3 examines the earliest literary sources for Greek sport, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as relevant visual and epigraphic evidence from the eighth century BCE. The central part of his essay consists of a detailed analysis of the funeral games for Patroklos in Book 23 of the *Iliad* and of the games held in Phaiakia in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*. Perry explores the ways that the poet's thematic concerns affect the presentation of sport in the Homeric poems and provides, among other things, a nuanced and stimulating reading of the famous remark by Laodamas that "there is no greater glory for a man . . . than what he achieves with his hands and feet" (*Odyssey* 8.147–8).

Nigel Nicholson's Chapter 4 concentrates on uses of sport in Greek literature. An advocate of New Historicism, Nicholson surveys various types of Greek literature to demonstrate the subtleties and intertextuality of the relevant texts. Much of his essay is devoted to a careful exploration of the representation of boxing in epinikian odes. Nicholson focuses on three traits that are assigned to boxing in those odes (beauty, moral excellence, and skill), and persuasively argues that the representation of boxing in epinikian odes formed part of larger debates over both the meaning of sport and the distribution of social and political power.

In Chapter 5 Jenifer Neils authoritatively explores the intersection of art and sport in ancient Greece, especially in vase painting and sculpture, by tracing the phases of an athlete's journey from training to competition to celebration of victory. In doing so she makes use of

many representations of sport found on Athenian vases from the Late Archaic period (c.520–480 BCE), including amphorae given as prizes at the Panathenaic Games. Her analysis highlights, and suggests explanations for, the predilection for scenes of athletic training on Athenian vases from that time.

In Chapter 6 H. W. Pleket demonstrates the value of inscriptions as evidence for Greek sport. He concentrates on the Hellenistic (323–31 BCE) and Roman (31 BCE–476 CE) periods and on inscriptions that relate to four themes: the ancient *gymnasion* as the foundation of mass sport, the agonistic “market,” associations of athletes, and athletes’ social status and values. Pleket’s discussion of those four themes leaves no doubt that inscriptions provide invaluable evidence for the history of Greek sport. For instance, numerous inscriptions reveal that, contrary to what one might conclude from literary sources, physical training in *gymnasia* continued to be of prime social importance in Greek communities during the Hellenistic period. Many of the sources discussed in Pleket’s essay also serve as a reminder that important inscriptions that bear on the history of sport continue to be discovered.

Ingomar Weiler’s Chapter 7 offers an interdisciplinary and international historiographical (and bibliographical) survey of important works and developments in Greek sport history during the last decade. He discusses selected major contributions, emphasizes publications in English, and leaves aside the modern reception and revival of the ancient Olympics. The large number of publications on which Weiler touches, and the range of places and languages in which they appeared, is a vivid demonstration of the vibrancy of ancient sport history as a field of study and the international appeal of this subject.

In Chapter 8 Thomas Heine Nielsen discusses the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia and the operation of the Olympic Games. He explores the tensions created by Olympia’s dual identities, as both a Panhellenic sanctuary and an extra-urban sanctuary of the city-state of Elis. The administration of the Olympics by Elis was reasonably impartial, but the atmosphere at the games was highly politicized, and competitions between athletes were understood by many as contests for status and supremacy between the city-states from which they came.

The next essay, Paul Christesen’s exploration of sport in Sparta, begins Part II of Section I, which focuses on the practice of sport in particular places in the Greek world. Christesen reviews basic information about the practice of sport in Sparta during the Classical period (480–323 BCE) and uses concepts and terminology taken from sociology to explore the relationship between sport and society in Sparta. He argues that sport fostered cohesive social relations among

Sparta's male citizens and in that way contributed meaningfully to maintaining the remarkable political stability that characterized Sparta for more than 400 years.

Kyle's Chapter 10 discusses Athens, the state for which we have the most abundant information. Athens' athletic games required major expenditures, and the facilities used by male citizens were prominent in social and civic life. Kyle explains the operation of various contests, especially in the Great Panathenaic festival, and he argues that athletics allowed Athens as a community – and Athenians individually – to display and publicize talents and resources. He also raises the question of the social origins of athletes at Athens, an issue treated more broadly in Chapter 13.

In Chapter 11 David Gilman Romano discusses the history of sport in Central Greece and the northern Peloponnese during the Archaic (700–480 BCE) and Classical periods. In addition to treating the physical settings and the programs of events of the Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games, Romano provides details of new and ongoing excavations at the sanctuary of Zeus at Mt Lykaion in Arcadia. He makes the intriguing suggestion that the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia and the ancient Olympics were at least in part modeled on the sanctuary of Zeus at Mt Lykaion and the games held there, which, in Romano's view, may well significantly predate the Olympics.

The subject of Carla M. Antonaccio's Chapter 12 is the practice of sport by residents of Greek communities in southern Italy and Sicily in the period between the early seventh and early fourth centuries BCE. Much of her essay is devoted to an exploration of sport at the city-states of Croton and Taras and the participation of the dynasts who ruled Gela, Syracuse, and Akragas at the Olympic and Pythian Games. Her nuanced explanation of the reasons why those dynasts lavishly expended resources pursuing equestrian victories at major athletic festivals in the Greek homeland includes insights into why there were no Panhellenic or even important regional athletic festivals in the Greek West.

In Chapter 13 Christesen examines a particularly important aspect of the relationship between sport and society in ancient Greece: the connection between democratization in society and in sport. Concentrating on the period between 700 and 300 BCE, he argues that sport promoted a sense of egalitarianism and unity among newly empowered members of Greek communities that experienced significant periods of democratization and thus played an important role in consolidating and extending democratization in the Greek world. This essay includes an excursus on the origin and spread of the fascinating Greek practice of athletic nudity, and the related development of the *gymnasion*. Christesen sees nudity as a claim to

citizenship and privileged status for those who could afford the time and leisure for nude athletic exercises.

As in many societies, education and rites of passage in Greece frequently involved physical training and sporting competitions. In Chapter 14 Werner Petermandl investigates the development and significance of the Greek practice of grouping athletes in competitions into two or three age-classes. He then looks at the relationship between educational practices and sport. Although privately funded education was more informal earlier, by the fourth century BCE Athens institutionalized cadet training in the *ephebeia*, and versions of ephebic training – a marker of status and ethnicity – spread widely throughout the Hellenistic world (and later the Greek East of the Roman Empire).

Andrew Lear's Chapter 15 investigates the erotic dimensions of Greek sport. He uses both textual and visual evidence to explore the homoerotic, typically pederastic, relationships that were closely associated with athletic facilities. Lear's essay includes discussion of three related and particularly significant issues: the origins of pederastic homoerotic relationships, homoerotic courting scenes on Athenian vases in which suitors appear to be presenting sacks of money, and the practice of infibulation. In regard to the first of these issues, he argues that pederasty was not a practice that stretched back into the primordial ages of Greek history but was in fact something that took shape during the Archaic period.

Kyle's third essay, Chapter 16, discusses various aspects of female sport in ancient Greece, including the footraces for virgins held at the festival to Hera at Olympia, the banning of mature females from attendance at the Olympic Games, and the circumstances behind the first female Olympic victory, by Kyniska of Sparta in the chariot race in 396 BCE. Kyle suggests that the sporting opportunities and participation of Greek females increased during the Hellenistic and Roman eras.

Christian Mann's Chapter 17 details the activities, attendance, and agendas of diverse groups on the margins of Greek sport. He looks carefully at officials in charge of running athletic contests, particularly the *Hellandikai* at Olympia, and at people such as jockeys, chariot drivers, coaches, trainers, musicians, and spectators who played important supporting roles at Greek athletic contests. He also explores the role of slaves in Greek sport and finds that social and legal barriers effectively prevented them from being active participants, with the caveat that those barriers seem to have eroded somewhat in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Chapter 18 is the first of two essays on facilities for Greek sport. In

that chapter Stephen G. Miller gives careful consideration to the evolution of stadia in the fifth through third centuries BCE. He makes use of exciting discoveries at Nemea (stadium, *hysplex*, tunnel, and *apodyterion*) and elsewhere to argue that a major change in the design of athletic facilities had social and political implications for the experience of spectatorship in Early Hellenistic Greece.

Continuing the focus on athletic settings, Michael Scott's Chapter 19 examines Greek athletic facilities other than stadia. He discusses in some detail the design, development, and athletic and social functions of *gymnasia* and *palaistrai*. Scott argues persuasively that there was a high degree of "spatial indeterminacy" in Greek athletic facilities, because structures and spaces associated with sport served a variety of purposes and because even particular kinds of athletic contests could be held in a variety of different facilities. This indeterminacy allowed communities to shape facilities that expressed their own unique histories, practices, identities, and aspirations.

In Chapter 20 Sarah C. Murray looks at the religious context of athletic festivals and at the relationship between religion and participation in athletics. She discusses how sport became intimately connected with religious festivals, ritual elements in sport, and the possibility that a kind of religious aura was believed to surround victorious athletes. Murray suggests that sport may have played an important role in shaping Greek religion and that many athletes believed in the importance of divine support for their athletic endeavors. However, she also warns against overestimating the importance of religion in sport. Religious concerns permeated most spheres of Greek life, and in that respect the role of religion in sport was neither particularly unusual nor unusually significant.

In Chapter 21 Zinon Papakonstantinou discusses criticisms of sport found in ancient Greek sources. He pays close attention to the genres of critical texts and the agendas of their authors. The literary motif of criticism of the adulation of athletes was limited but persistent in Greek literature well into the Roman period, and philosophers, orators, and other intellectuals contested the value of athletic success. However sincere or satirical, the critics had little effect on the Greeks' passion for contests and athletes.

In Chapter 22 Winthrop Lindsay Adams explores the athletic practices and ambitions of Macedonians, both within and outside their homeland. He details the opportunistic use of sport by royal Macedonians, who declared their Greek ethnicity and sought glory through participation in and victory at the Olympic Games. While some works suggest that Alexander the Great was critical of athletics, Adams shows that Alexander had a consistent policy of staging games to celebrate victories or honor dead companions while on campaign.

Adams also looks at the evidence for athletic facilities and practices in Macedonia itself, notably the gymnasiarchal inscription from Beroia.

One of Alexander's generals, Ptolemy I, became ruler of Egypt after Alexander's death, and he and his dynastic successors actively promoted sport in their kingdom. Sofie Remijnsen's Chapter 23 on Hellenistic Egypt shows that the Ptolemies developed athletic festivals and patronized the participation of Greeks from Egypt in games in mainland Greece, raising issues of propaganda and ethnic tensions. She focuses on two questions, namely, what drew the population of Egypt, particularly Greek immigrants to Egypt, to sport? and what obstacles complicated its introduction? *Gymnasia* and the practice of athletic training spread throughout Egypt starting in the third century BCE, even though they did not receive the sort of royal patronage that led to the foundation of athletic contests in Alexandria from an early date. Remijnsen argues that the internal political structures of the Ptolemaic Kingdom inhibited the spread of athletic contests outside of Alexandria and that it was only in the third century CE, after a reorganization of what was then a Roman province, that many Egyptian communities founded competitions.

Pleket's Chapter 24 provides another study of later periods (Hellenistic and Roman) in yet another region of the Greek world. He draws heavily on epigraphic sources to explore the significant expansion of the number of athletic festivals in Asia Minor between the fourth century BCE and the third century CE and the growth of a "sports culture" that encouraged training in local *gymnasia* and richly rewarded success in athletic competitions. Pleket discusses in some detail the generally positive relationship between Roman authorities and urban elites in Asia Minor with respect to the foundation of athletic contests. The recent discovery at Alexandria Troas of Hadrian's pronouncements on athletes, rewards, and athletic festivals adds greatly to our knowledge of that relationship.

Roger Dunkle's Chapter 25 begins Section II, which focuses on spectacle and sport in the Roman world. Dunkle surveys the different types of Roman spectacular entertainments including *ludi* (drama and games, especially chariot races), *munera* (gladiatorial combats), *venationes* (staged beast hunts), *naumachiae* (staged naval battles), and *athletae* (Greek-style athletics). To prepare readers for more specialized discussions, he clarifies terms and explains the activities, settings, and operation of these spectacles. He ends with an epilogue on Christian opposition and the decline of spectacles in the Late Empire.

In Chapter 26 Giampiero Bevagna argues that we should avoid the traditional "Greek-centered" approach to understanding Etruscan sport. The Etruscans, for example, had little interest in the Greek

pentathlon. They were especially interested in watching their indigenous versions of boxing, wrestling, and horse races in the context of funeral games or public entertainments. Above all, Etruscan games were nonparticipatory spectator sports, and that spectacular orientation likely influenced the Romans' inclination to watch rather than compete in athletic contests. This essay is somewhat analogous to Rutter's Chapter 2 on the Bronze Age, in that both make heavy use of visual evidence to explore sport and spectacle in societies for which significant quantities of textual material are lacking. In addition, both essays qualify illusions of Greek and Roman uniqueness by showing that sport and spectacle were prominent and popular in earlier cultures.

In Chapter 27 Zara Martirosova Torlone looks at the portrayal of sport and spectacle in Roman literature. She highlights the importance of genre in shaping such portrayals and divides the relevant texts into two broad headings: "serious" genres (e.g., history, epic poetry, philosophical dialogue, panegyric speeches, formal letters) and "lighter" genres (e.g., love elegy, the Roman novel, satire, epigram). She argues that writers working in the serious genres tried to resolve what many Romans saw as a fundamental opposition between entertainments of all kinds and traditional Roman virtues such as manliness and devotion to duty. They did so by characterizing spectacle as a display of aggressive masculinity that served the interests of the Roman state. Writers working in the lighter genres, on the other hand, frequently focused on the salacious and scandalous aspects of spectacle.

In Chapter 28 Steven L. Tuck details how the events of the Roman arena and circus inspired an enormous amount and variety of artistic production from elaborate mosaics to sarcophagi. He approaches the relevant material by dividing it into five groups based on subject matter (beast hunts, public executions, gladiatorial combats, chariot races, and sport) and five different groups based on context (sarcophagi, amphitheaters, baths, tombs, and houses). He stresses the importance of considering the context in which depictions of spectacle and sport originally appeared and shows that the relevant images served as status displays, commemorations of achievement, and demonstrations of Roman power.

Gregory S. Aldrete's Chapter 29 explores what material evidence can tell us about Roman sport and spectacle. He discusses physical items actually used by participants or spectators (e.g., gladiator equipment), inscriptions (e.g., epitaphs and graffiti), and simple cultural objects (e.g., toys, lamps, and pots). Aldrete points out that whereas most art and literature was produced for the elite, who were frequently spectators but rarely performers at Roman spectacles,

material evidence can provide a great deal of insight into people from more humble backgrounds, both participants and spectators. He also discusses the burials and bones of gladiators discovered at Ephesos and the new information they have revealed about the lives of gladiators.

Jerry Toner's Chapter 30 on historiography and recent trends in research on Roman spectacle and sport shows the value of a social historical approach to the study of that subject matter. He considers spectacle and sport as entertainment, as a venue for the display of political and moral ideas and ideals, and as a setting in which political leaders (especially emperors) and the populace could communicate with each other. He places particular emphasis on how audiences could and did play active roles at spectacles and were thus much more than passive spectators.

Chapter 31 begins Section II, Part II, the essays in which are not arranged geographically, unlike those in Part II of Section I. Greece was a land of many independent polities, and social historical questions about sport in the Greek world can be effectively pursued by examining how sport functioned in different regions or states such as Athens and Sparta. Rome, on the other hand, was itself a state, a very populous city, and the capital of the Roman Empire, and, as such, the center of a vast entertainment system. Part II of Section II thus concentrates on Rome, which provides ample opportunity for discussing performers, spectators, and the social context of spectacles. The essays in this section examine gladiatorial combats, chariot racing, beast hunts, spectacular executions, and athletic competitions.

Garrett G. Fagan's Chapter 31 investigates the Roman popular fascination with gladiators and violent arena spectacles. His argument begins with insights drawn from spectatorship at sporting events and violent public spectacles (e.g., boxing matches and public executions) held in recent centuries (and in some cases up to the present day). Fagan then considers how "sporting" aspects of gladiatorial combats (rules, referees, skills, showmanship, suspense) made them intensely engaging. He finishes by employing social psychology (e.g., theories of "affective dispositions") to explore the allure violent spectacles held for Roman audiences. Fagan concludes that fascination with violent spectacles was not peculiar to Romans but rather was and continues to be rooted in human nature.

In Chapter 32 Stephen Brunet looks at the minor but intriguing phenomenon of female arena combatants. Although most performers in Roman spectacles were male, Brunet shows that some women trained as gladiators and fought against one another or against beasts, but not against dwarfs. Brunet persuasively challenges the interpretation of a woman's burial in London as that of a supposed

female “gladiatrix.” He suggests that there was interest in female gladiators precisely because women were not supposed to be involved with weapons and combat.

Sinclair Bell’s Chapter 33 examines the significance of chariot races in Roman society. Using evidence from literature, inscriptions, and mosaics, he explains the procedures of the races in the Circus Maximus, and the status and allure of charioteers as star performers. He delves into the emotional experiences of the spectators and fans and identifies some of the more important reasons why so many Romans from all social classes were ardent fans of chariot racing.

Chris Epplert’s Chapter 34 discusses violent Roman animal shows (*venationes*) in which beasts fought each other or were hunted by trained professionals. He investigates their origins and development in Republican Rome and their persistence under the Empire; the complex infrastructure needed to procure, maintain, and transport exotic animals for shows; and the performers who fought the beasts. He argues that the decline of such shows in the fifth and sixth centuries CE was due not so much to moral objections as to resource shortages, which made it increasingly difficult for Romans to acquire exotic animals in substantial numbers.

Epplert’s second essay, Chapter 35, explores the Roman practice of publicly executing convicts, prisoners of war, and Christians, among others, in brutal and spectacular ways such as exposure to beasts, crucifixion, burning, and reenactments of myths. He traces the history of public executions in Rome from their origins up through the sixth century CE, and discusses the reasons for increased judicial severity in later centuries. Epplert shows that Romans believed that spectacular executions were important to maintaining a law-abiding citizenry and stable social order. He also points out that female wrongdoers were punished in particularly cruel and degrading ways because offences committed by women, who were seen as naturally suited to playing a subordinate social role, were perceived as an unusually overt threat to society.

Hugh M. Lee’s Chapter 36 on Greek sports at Rome shows that, contrary to traditional opinion, Romans did not long resist Greek sport. Triumphant generals introduced demonstrations of Greek athletics, and emperors followed Caesar’s and Augustus’s example in fostering Greek games. Nero and Domitian founded festivals and built facilities, Greek exercises were practiced in the baths, and Rome came to house the headquarters of the great athletic guilds.

Part III of Section II, which begins with Hazel Dodge’s Chapter 37, moves to a thematic approach to Roman spectacle and sport. This first chapter examines the Roman amphitheater, a quintessentially Roman

architectural invention and enduring symbol of Roman culture. Dodge discusses the architectural origins of amphitheaters and demonstrates, with a host of examples, how the Colosseum was the model for the dispersion of that architectural form in Italy and the Western Empire. She also notes that in the East some amphitheaters were built but more often preexisting venues were modified for Roman games.

Dodge's second essay, Chapter 38, examines purpose-built spectator facilities other than amphitheaters in the Roman world in the form of circuses, stadia, and *naumachiae* (artificial basins used for staged naval combats and aquatic displays¹), as well as venues designed for other purposes that were adapted to house Roman spectacle. She shows that, influenced by regional socioeconomic and cultural factors, facilities varied noticeably in different parts of the Roman world, and that the spread of such facilities attests to the importance of Roman-style spectacle throughout the Empire, including the eastern Mediterranean.

Rose MacLean's Chapter 39, which discusses people on the margins of Roman spectacle, focuses on condemned criminals, support personnel, and Jews. She demonstrates that participation in and spectatorship at spectacles was a means by which varied groups from different social levels and backgrounds supported or contested social norms. For example, attendance at Roman-style spectacles was a mechanism some Jews used to declare their allegiance to the Roman state, while other Jews expressed resistance to Roman rule in part through rejection of Roman spectacle.

In Chapter 40 John Zaleski makes it clear that religion was an integral part of Roman spectacle. He explores the role of religion in the origination of many forms of Roman spectacle such as gladiatorial games, and discusses the idea, which has found support among many scholars, that Roman spectacle was progressively secularized and politicized. Zaleski is dubious that there was ever any significant diminution in the religious significance of Roman spectacle, and he buttresses this conclusion by looking at some of the religious objects associated with spectacle, namely statues, votive altars, and curse tablets.

Kathryn Mammel's Chapter 41 examines opposition to spectacle and sport in the Roman world. She looks in detail at opposition to Roman-style spectacles from literary elites and Stoics; at opposition to Greek-style athletics from elite Romans, doctors, and intellectuals; and at Jewish and Christian objections to sport and spectacle. She finds that the criticisms of sport and spectacle were frequently a means of group and individual self-fashioning and that critics sought to define themselves in opposition to various spectacle-loving "others."

The final part of Section II offers essays on acculturation through spectacles and the survival of Roman spectacle after the collapse of the Western Empire in the fifth century CE. In Chapter 42 Michael J. Carter examines the popularity of gladiatorial combats and beast hunts in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, an area that was strongly influenced by Greek culture. He shows that the cultural discourse through spectacles was more complicated than a simple imposition or one-way process of “Romanization.” Roman-style spectacles were arranged by the people of the provinces and were opportunities for those people to respond, both positively and negatively, to a key part of Roman culture. Carter also makes the case that responses to Roman spectacle in the eastern part of the Roman Empire were further complicated by the fact that Greeks were familiar with spectatorship through their own tradition of sport and recognized in gladiator combats a martial ideology akin to Greek athletics. Roman spectacle was not, therefore, anything like a completely foreign experience for Greek audiences.

Finally, David Alan Parnell’s Chapter 43 looks at chariot racing in hippodromes and pantomimes in theaters in Constantinople in the sixth century CE. The Byzantine government took over the administration of the public spectacles of the hippodrome and theater, and sport, spectacle, and crowd disorder at spectacles became deeply intertwined. Parnell discusses in some detail the types and causes of riots in Constantinople, including the famous Nika Riot of 532. He suggests that the young partisans of the Blue and Green chariot racing teams fomented riots in part out of a desire for “sport” in the sense of personal competition, aggression, and team spirit.

NOTE

- 1 The same word, *naumachiae*, is used to mean both this and, as discussed by Dunkle in Chapter 25, the staged naval battles themselves.

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SECTION I

Greece

PART I

The Background

CHAPTER 1

Greek Athletic Competitions

The Ancient Olympics and More

Donald G. Kyle

1 Introduction

Before the start of the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE the reluctant Corinthian Adeimantos remarked that “at the games those who start too soon are flogged,” and the eager Athenian Themistokles responded that “those who start slowly win no victory crown.”¹ Herodotus (8.59) could use this athletic metaphor because the practices and terms of sport were common knowledge to most ancient Greeks.² In the present day, on the other hand, most people are unfamiliar with the “nuts and bolts” of ancient Greek sport. This essay, accordingly, provides a basic overview of the contests, contexts, categories, terms, and rules of sport in Archaic and Classical Greece (700–323 BCE). It focuses on “athletics,” a term derived from the Greek words for contest (*athlos*) and prize (*athlon*) (Scanlon 2002: 7–9; Kyle 2007: 9–11). “Athletics,” taken as a subset of the broader, more inclusive term, “sport,” applies herein to public, physical competitions with prizes.

We begin with some matters of perception and approach. The ancient Olympics, with their wreath prizes, huge crowds, and famous victors, were the pinnacle of Greek athletic competition. Since the Olympics were revived in the late nineteenth century CE, the ancient Olympics have frequently been viewed through the prism of the modern Olympics. Despite evidence and scholarship to the contrary (Young 1984, 2004: 138–57), people eager to accept the historical authenticity of the modern Olympics have been inclined to accept illusions and outright misconceptions about the ancient Olympics. The

modern games did adopt some ancient events (e.g., running, wrestling), but they also incorporated modern events (e.g., shooting, bicycling) and invented new traditions. The ancient Olympics, in fact, had no medals or second prizes, no team or women's events, no winter or water sports, and no ideology of universal brotherhood and peace. The modern games, however entertaining and admirable, have become more and more removed from those of ancient Olympia.

This essay concentrates on the events at the ancient Olympics because such events were fairly standard and practiced in most ancient Greek communities, but it is important to realize that there was no rigid uniformity throughout Greek athletics. Like the city-states themselves, Greek athletics show both broad patterns (e.g., footraces and wrestling, limited female participation) and regional variations (different local events and prizes). They also show both continuity (ongoing, close ties to religious festivals) and change over time (more games and nontraditional participants). As Jason König (2010: 8) writes, "Underlying the shared, Mediterranean-wide athletic practice was a vast range of different local cultures, each with its own priorities and its own debates."

To understand Greek athletics thoroughly, and to investigate social issues, scholars have gone beyond Olympia and the other "crown" games, which conventionally are called "stephanitic" because they awarded only wreaths (*stephanoi* in Greek). Scholars now also study games held in cities and sanctuaries as part of local athletic festivals; these local games are conventionally termed "chrematitic" because they typically awarded prizes of material worth (from the Greek *chremata*, meaning valuable items).³

2 From Funeral Games to Athletic Festivals

The earliest literary account of Greek athletics comes from Homer's *Iliad* (23.262–897), which describes how Achilles organized funeral games consisting of eight events (starting with a chariot race and ending with a spear-throwing contest) for his dead friend Patroklos. With elite warrior athletes and substantial material prizes (weapons and war plunder), these funeral games suggest the use of athletics as surrogate combat. Elsewhere Homer (*Iliad* 22.158–64) contrasts funeral games that featured horse races with rich prizes, such as elaborate bronze cauldrons and women, with more humble occasions that featured footraces offering simple prizes such as sacrificial beasts

or oxhides. His *Odyssey* (8.97–253) describes noble youths in Phaiakia competing in public but more casual contests, not for prizes but to entertain their guest Odysseus. Homer's athletic world, then, which probably reflects the ninth to eighth century, already shows patterns and variations. (For more on sport in the Homeric poems, see Chapter 3 in this volume.)

By the Archaic period (700–480) the phenomenon of Greek athletics had grown greatly (Christesen 2007b) and was even more complex and varied. Athletic contests were associated with competition for glory and status, militarism, eroticism, and conspicuous consumption and display. Competitions could apparently include traditions from sources as varied as funeral games, initiation rituals, and hero cults, but there was a pattern: most formal public athletic competitions were held as components of religious festivals.

Games were seen as an appropriate way to honor gods and heroes, and a fundamental tie between religion, sanctuaries, and games endured for centuries. Before competing, athletes prayed for divine assistance, swore sacred oaths, and vowed dedications to major deities such as Zeus and Athena and to gods especially associated with athletics such as Hermes and Herakles. Victors were thought to enjoy divine favor, some great athletes were thought to have magical powers, and some dead athletes were venerated with hero cults (see Chapter 20). The prominence of athletics increased over time, with more events, dedications, statues, and expanded facilities, but religion continued to hallow and regularize the games. Athletics never secularized the festivals, nor did the contests become a surrogate religion or a replacement for piety. When Christian emperors suppressed athletic contests such as the Olympics in the fifth century CE, they did so out of concerns about persistent pagan piety.

3 The Historical Ancient Olympics

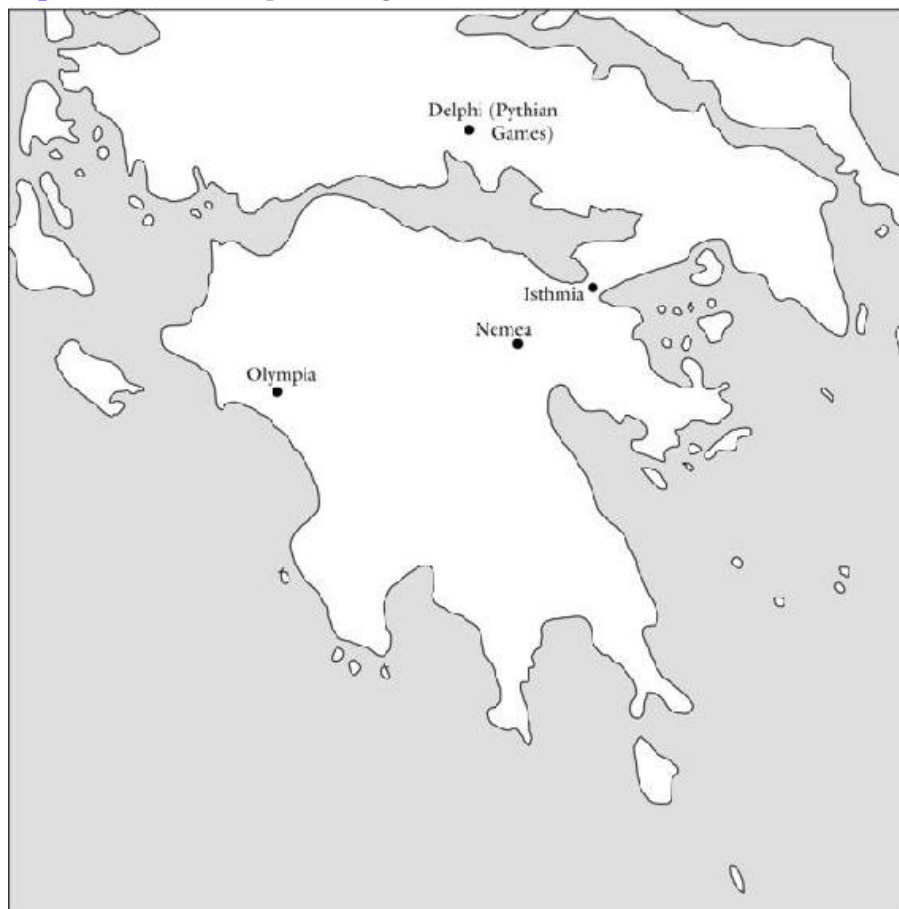
The sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia in the city-state of Elis in the northeastern Peloponnese housed the earliest, greatest, and longest-enduring Greek athletic festival.⁴ (The political entity of Elis, whose territory encompassed a fair amount of the northwestern Peloponnese, had its capital at an urban center called Elis; see [Map 8.1](#).) Athletic contests were also established at the sanctuaries at Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea in the sixth century, about a hundred years after the foundation of the Olympic Games. These four competitions became

known as the “circuit” (*periodos*) of sacred crown games (see [Map 1.1](#)). Olympia was the fixed site of the Olympic Games, which were held every fourth year in late summer (July–August) at the second full moon after the summer solstice. The timing corresponded with a lull in agricultural work, and the event was correlated with an astronomical phenomenon understood by all. By the fourth century, numbered Olympiads, the four-year periods from one set of games to the next, and the names of the men’s sprint race winners in those Olympiads, provided the basis for a common chronology for the Greeks (Christesen 2007a: 1–15).

The traditional foundation date of 776 for the ancient Olympics has been challenged since antiquity (Christesen 2007a: 18–21), and archaeology now suggests that major contests at Olympia developed only around 700. Limited and local games probably arose slowly at Olympia, perhaps in response to gatherings of worshippers and as a supplement to an early religious festival. By the seventh century Olympia offered events in two broad categories: gymnastic or “naked” contests (*gymnikoi agones*: track and field and “combat” (fighting) events) and equestrian or hippic contests (*hippikoi agones*: horse and chariot races) (Miller 2004a: 31–86).

Before each Olympics, heralds (*spondophoroi*) from Elis traveled throughout the Greek world announcing the upcoming games, inviting athletes, spectators, and groups of envoys from Greek states, and proclaiming the so-called sacred truce (*ekecheiria*). This truce or armistice was not a general or common peace. It forbade the entry of armies into Eleian territory during the Olympics and ordered safe passage through any state for travelers to and from the games. The truce assisted the success of the games, but it has been overly idealized in modern times. It did not stop wars throughout Greece (Lämmer 2010). The fiercely independent city-states politicized games and decorated sanctuaries with monuments and trophies commemorating Greek military victories against fellow Greeks as well as non-Greeks. The truce helped make it possible for athletes and spectators from Greek communities throughout the Mediterranean basin to converge on Olympia and, despite local differences of dialect and laws, take part in an experience grounded in a shared religious piety and enthusiasm for sport. The Olympics were thus “Panhellenic,” which should be understood as meaning that they were open to all free Greek males and attracted visitors from a geographically diverse array of Greek communities. It does not, however, mean that Olympia or other Panhellenic sanctuaries such as Delphi were havens of peace and harmony (Scott 2010: 256–64). (For further discussion, see Chapters 8 and 19.)

Map 1.1 Sites of the *periodos* games.



Preparations began 10 months before the start of the games, at the city of Elis (located about 25 miles north of Olympia), with the selection of officials, originally called *diatateres* but later (by c.480) called *Hellandikai*, “judges of the Greeks.” By 400 there were 9 *Hellandikai* and from 348 the number remained 10 (Pausanias 5.9.4–6). These men, apparently chosen by lot from a preselected group of Eleian citizens, learned the proper customs from Eleian officials (*nomothetai*, Pausanias 6.24.3). As the sponsor of the games, Elis had headquarters for these officials and also training facilities for athletes. Aspiring athletes had to train at the city of Elis for a month prior to the games (Philostratus *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 5.43). As was probably the case at most major games, the judges supervised and scrutinized athletes to ensure their competence and to dissuade or select out any deemed unworthy (Pausanias 6.23.1–4). (For more on the *Hellandikai*, see Chapters 8 and 17.) At Elis, as in their prior training at home at their local *gymnasion* (gymnasium, a place for exercising nude) or *palaistra* (wrestling school), and in the upcoming

games at Olympia, all gymnastic athletes (but not equestrians) had to be completely nude. They applied olive oil to their bodies before exercise and later used a metal scraper or strigil (*stlēgis*) to remove oil, sweat, and dirt. Such intriguing customs, and the related homoeroticism, have been much debated (Scanlon 2002: 64–97, 199–273; see also Chapter 13, which includes an excursus on nudity).

Athletes at Olympia differed not by ethnicity but by event and age. All free Greek males were eligible, but females, non-Greeks, and slaves were excluded from direct participation. Olympic contests were held among men (*andres*), who most probably were 18 years of age and up, and, from 632 on, among boys (*paidēs*), perhaps aged 12–17 (Golden 1998: 104–12; see Chapter 14). Judges ensured that all entrants for boys' events were members of a Greek state, had a father and a family, and were free and not illegitimate (Philostratus *Gymnastikos* 25; Crowther 2004: 23–33).

Competitors went to Olympia on their own initiative; they were not screened or selected at home by state officials. Most athletes represented their native cities, but they were allowed to transfer their loyalty and victories by declaring that they were representing another state. The first known “free agent,” Astylos, won Olympic footraces for the city of Croton (in 488, 484) and then for Syracuse in 480 (Young 1984: 141–2).

Early Olympians came from Elis or nearby states, but the scope of participation increased as Greeks spread throughout the Mediterranean world. However, although Macedonians, Alexandrians, and others would test and expand the limits of Greekness and eligibility, Olympia traditionally upheld the hierarchies of Greek above barbarian, free above slave, and male above female.

A couple of days before the official opening of the games, a procession of Eleian officials, athletes, trainers, official representatives from individual Greek communities (*theoriai*), and spectators, perhaps several hundred all told, set out for Olympia. Before they left, Eleian officials offered athletes a chance to withdraw (Philostratus *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 5.43). The procession stopped overnight en route, and the officials purified themselves at the spring of Pieria as they approached the sanctuary. With perhaps a hundred thousand people in attendance, the atmosphere at Olympia was comparable to any major Greek festival or modern sporting spectacle.

At Olympia athletes swore sacred oaths before a statue of Zeus. Pausanias (5.24.9–10) says that the athletes, along with their fathers, brothers, and trainers, swore that they would “do nothing evil” against the games. Athletes also swore that they had been training responsibly for 10 months. The *Hellānodikai* who judged the ages of

boys (and by 384 of colts) took an oath to judge fairly, accept no gifts, and keep secret any information about the competitors.

Three judges ran the hippic events, three ran the footraces, and the rest ran the combat events. Conspicuous with their purple robes and forked sticks, the judges could expel, fine, or scourge athletes for cheating or lying. They paired opponents, assigned lanes or byes using lots, identified victors, and awarded prize wreaths. The judges' decisions were absolute and irrevocable. As Stephen Miller points out (2004a: 19, 232–3), winners were chosen by what he calls objective criteria – prizes were given to whomever crossed the line first or forced his opponent to submit rather than by the more subjective criteria used in dance and musical events. Nevertheless, there were controversies. In 396 two of the three judges credited the victory in the sprint to their countryman Eupolemos of Elis, while the third chose Leon of Ambracia (Pausanias 6.3.7). When Leon appealed to the Olympic Council (an Eleian governmental body), the biased judges were fined but Eupolemos's win stood. In another incident, in 372, one of the judges entered and won two hippic contests (Pausanias 6.1.4–5). Thereafter, no Eleian could both judge and compete in an equestrian event. (For further discussion of the actions of Eleian judges at the Olympics, see Chapter 8.)

At Olympia there were only individual, first-place victors, and they received only a wreath of olive leaves from the judges and bunches of foliage and fillets (wool ribbons) from admiring spectators. For each winner there were far more losers, and there was little dignity in defeat. Pindar mentions defeated boys sneaking home by back streets (*Pythian* 8.85–7). Despite their oath, ancient Olympians sought advantages and sometimes crossed the line. Some offenses were ad hoc fouls in the heat of competition, but others involved ruthless ambition, planning, and collusion. By the fourth century *Zanes*, statues of Zeus paid for by athletes caught and fined for lying, bribery, and cheating, lined the route to the stadium (Pausanias 5.21.2–18).

4 The Olympic Program of Contests

The exact sequence of activities at Olympia remains uncertain, but by the mid-fifth century contests and religious rituals were intermingled over a five-day festival (Lee 2001). The following list gives the traditional reconstruction of the development of the program of events (based on Pausanias 5.8.5–9.2, whose accuracy on details is

sometimes doubted; cf. Christesen 2007a: 16–17, 66, 476–8).

~~Events added to Olympic program~~

~~7200~~ 7200 m sprint (*stadion*)

~~7240~~ 7240 m run (*diaulos*)

~~7200~~ 7200 m race (*dolichos*)

~~688~~ 688 mathlon, wrestling (*pale*)

~~680~~ 680 m-horse chariot race (*tethrippon*)

~~648~~ 648 m-in wrestling (*pankration*), horseback race (*keles*)

~~632~~ 632 m's *stadion*, boys' wrestling

~~628~~ 628 m's pentathlon (discontinued immediately thereafter)

~~616~~ 616 m's boxing

~~5200~~ 5200 m run in armor (*hoplites*, *hoplitodromos*)

~~500~~ 500 m-e-cart race (*apene*)

~~406~~ 406 m-horseback race for mares (*kalpe* or *anabates*)

~~444~~ 444 m-e and *kalpe* discontinued

~~408~~ 408 m-horse chariot race (*synoris*)

~~396~~ 396 m-tests for heralds and trumpeters

~~384~~ 384 m-horse colt chariot race

~~268~~ 268 m-horse colt chariot race

~~256~~ 256 m-horseback race for colts

~~200~~ 200 m's all-in wrestling (*pankration*)

5 Gymnic Contests

The *stadion* race was a basic sprint down the track, and Koroibos of Elis was supposedly the first *stadion* winner at Olympia. A *stadion* was also a Greek measure of distance, some 600 Greek feet. The *stadion* at Olympia was 192.28 meters, the *stadion* at Delphi was 177.5 meters, and that at Nemea was 178 meters. Modern exactitude was not required, and the measurements used and the lengths of tracks varied from site to site.

Using rectangular, not oval, tracks, runners in races longer than the sprint had to turn around a wooden post or posts (Miller 2004a: 35–43). The *diaulos* or “double-flute” race was of two lengths, down and back (c.384 meters), with each runner turning around his own individual post. The *hoplites* or *hoplitodromos* was a *diaulos* with the runners wearing helmet, shield, and sometimes greaves (shin guards). In the *dolichos*, the long race of perhaps 20 lengths (c.3,800 meters), all runners turned around a single post.

Elsewhere in Greece torch races transferred sacred fire from one altar to another, but we have no sound evidence for a torch race or relay, or ultra-long-distance races, at Olympia. Greek long-distance

messengers (*hemerodromoi*) could run 26 miles and further (Herodotus 6.105–6, Nielsen 2009), but the modern marathon race was invented in 1896 and has no real basis in ancient sport.

Runners started from an upright position, with their left feet somewhat ahead of their right feet and their toes in parallel grooves in stone starting sills (*balbides*). Similar sills were also found at the opposite end of the track. Holes for turning posts (*kampteres*) set into these sills indicate lanes for up to 20 runners at Olympia. For centuries the start was auditory, and, as Herodotus mentions, athletes who committed a false start were flogged, but by c.300 many stadia, including that at Olympia, had a starting mechanism (*hysplex*). Best known from Nemea, the *hysplex* used tensioned ropes to drop lane gates simultaneously, ensuring fair starts (see [Figure 18.2](#)). (For further discussion of the *hysplex* in particular and ancient stadia in general, see Chapter 18.)

The pentathlon combined five subevents: discus (*diskos*), javelin (*akon*), broad jump (*halma*), running (a *stadion* race), and wrestling. Running and wrestling existed as independent events, but the other subevents were held only as part of the pentathlon. Debate continues about the origin, status, operation, and scoring of the pentathlon and about the techniques of the subevents, but this composite event was probably created as a way to test excellence in three events (the discus, javelin, and jump; see [Figure 1.1](#)). Running and wrestling were perhaps added to help determine an overall victor.

Usually of bronze, discuses varied in size and weight throughout Greece. Olympia kept three identical discuses for official use (Pausanias 6.19.4). Debate on the technique of the throw continues, in part fostered by Myron's famous fifth-century sculpture of a discus thrower (the *Diskobolos*). Rather than a full rotation like the modern "free throw," the ancient throw was probably an underhand pitch of the right arm as the left leg was advanced forward. In throwing the javelin athletes used a leather thong (*ankyle*), held by the fingers and wrapped around the middle of a light javelin but not fastened to it, to impart a rifling effect to improve distance and accuracy. Pentathletes used metal or stone weights (*halteres*) (shaped rather like dumbbells and varying in size and weight) during their jumps to improve distances. Running up to the starting sill, the jumper swung the weights forward at the take-off to aid his momentum and then thrust them backwards for added distance, dropping them before they became a hindrance.

Figure 1.1 Panathenaic prize amphora showing events from the pentathlon, c.530–520 BCE. *Source:* British Museum 1842, 0314.1, © Trustees of the British Museum.



Scholars disagree on the sequence of events and the means used to select victors in the pentathlon. The first three wins by one athlete could produce a winner and end the competition, and the discus, javelin, and jump were nonindependent events, so these three events probably took place first. Xenophon (*Hellenika* 7.4.29) suggests that wrestling was the final event, so the run was probably held fourth. To select the winner, scholars have suggested points systems, comparative victories or relative placements, and systems with eliminations, byes, lots, and rematches. Sport fans in the modern world expect consistency in such technical matters but, again, Greek sport was not perfectly standardized. Procedures possibly varied by place and over time.⁵

Greek combat sports (wrestling, boxing, and *pankration*) were not for the faint of heart. Fouls or clinching to stall a fight brought blows from the judge's stick. Greeks called these three the "heavy events"

(*barea athla*), probably because heavier athletes tended to dominate owing to the fact that there were no weight classes or time limits. In uneven fields in combat events byes were allotted, and an athlete might have to face an opponent who had just “sat out” a round (an *ephedros*) and who had thus gained a distinct advantage.

Wrestling (*pale*) took place from an upright position and involved an array of sophisticated holds and throws. Like boxing and *pankration*, matches were held in an area of loosened earth (the *skamma* or pit) in the stadium and were decided by three out of five falls (Poliakoff 1987: 23–53). According to an inscribed sacred law (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 48.541) dating to around 525–500 and found at Olympia, finger breaking was not allowed and was punishable by flogging. Perhaps the rules changed later, for the wrestler Leontiskos of Messene won twice at Olympia (456, 452) by bending his opponents’ fingers (Pausanias 6.4.3). The most famous Greek wrestler, Milo of Croton, won an amazing seven times at Olympia in the sixth century. At Olympia around 520 no wrestler would face him, so he won *akoniti*, meaning “dustless” or unopposed.

Greek boxing (*pyx*, *pygmachia*, *pygme*) was spectacularly brutal, bloody, and dangerous. Boxers wrapped their hands and wrists with long oxhide leather straps (*himantes*) to protect their hands – not to spare their opponents’ faces. Eurydamas of Cyrene supposedly had his teeth knocked out during a match, but he swallowed them so his opponent would not notice, and went on to win (Aelian *Historical Miscellany* 10.19). Most blows were directed to the head, and Greek art graphically depicts bleeding and disfigured boxers with scars, cauliflower ears, and broken noses. Boxers battered each other until one was knocked out or admitted defeat by raising his index finger. Some fighters died rather than submit (Scanlon 2002: 304–7), and states even found it necessary to confirm the legal immunity of athletes who accidentally killed their opponents (Demosthenes 23.53). In 492 Olympic officials denied a victory to Kleomedes of Astypalaia for apparently intentionally killing his opponent in boxing (Pausanias 6.9.6).

The *pankration* was a brutal free-for-all combining wrestling and boxing, with few rules (Poliakoff 1987: 54–63). Only gouging and biting were prohibited; punching, kicking, choking, and blows to the genitals were not. Like boxing, matches went on until someone raised his finger and gave up, was incapacitated, or died.

With notions of “all or nothing” and “win at all costs,” combat sports entailed a tension between the desire to win and the risk of injury or death (Scanlon 2002: 274–322). In 564, while expiring in a stranglehold, the pankratiast Arrhichion of Phigaleia is said to have dislocated his opponent’s ankle, forcing him to submit to a dead but

victorious opponent (Pausanias 8.40.1–2; Philostratus *Imagines* 2.6; Poliakoff 1987: 62–3, 91). The motif of symbolic and sometimes actual death in competition, then, is found in Greek and not just Roman culture.

Many people in the present day are shocked – or intrigued – by the Greeks’ apparent insensitivity to violence, dangers, and even death in the stadium. Like people before and after them, Greeks found orchestrated violence alluring, and they admired combat athletes for their toughness, endurance, and fighting spirit.

Greeks saw excellence in athletics and war as analogous (Golden 1998: 23–8; Spivey 2004: 1–29), and combat events seem to suggest surrogate warfare or military training. The *hoplitodromos* may reflect military developments; it came into being at roughly the same time as the Greek armies directly encountered Persian military forces for the first time and may have been intended to help prepare Greek soldiers to deal with a new and dangerous enemy (Sekunda 1998: 31). Pausanias (5.8.10) suggests that it was added to the Olympic program to provide military training, and Philostratus (*Gymnastikos* 7) suggests that this race, the final event in the games, signaled the end of the truce and the return to a state of war. However, in his foundational study of Greek combat sports, Poliakoff argues that combat sports were at best indirect preparation for battle (1987: 94–103), and some scholars have recently argued that the *gymnasion* may not have come into being to train soldiers, as once thought (Christesen 2007b).

6 Hippic Contests

Greek geography was far from ideal for horses or chariots, and maintaining horses for competitions was proverbially expensive, but rich families welcomed the hippic events as opportunities to display their wealth and gain social status through conspicuous consumption. The owners of the horses were declared the winners, and most hippic victors did not actually drive or ride their horses in competitions. Pindar praises two owners who did drive their own chariots, “like the heroes of old” (*Isthmian* 1.15, *Pythian* 5.21, 115). Usually hirelings and slaves, the jockeys and charioteers who risked their lives, were not allowed to enter on their own or to win for themselves, and they received scant recognition (Nicholson 2005: 25–116). Owners did not even need to be present, thus allowing absentee and even female victors (see Chapter 16).

The four-horse chariot race (*tethrippon*) of 12 laps (c.14,000 meters) was the most costly and spectacular Greek contest. The

simpler, but still costly, two-horse chariot race (*synoris*) went 8 laps (c.9,500 meters). In both races charioteers, who wore tunics, goaded their horses on and raced their chariots, built light for speed, over a racetrack with hairpin turns. Unlike the Roman circus, the Greek hippodrome (Pausanias 6.20.10 describes the Olympic venue) lacked a central dividing barrier to prevent head-on collisions. Sophocles (*Electra* 681–756) recounts a fictional *tethrippon* at Delphi in which only 1 of 10 chariots finishes the race and in which multiple crashes result in fatalities among the drivers. The bloody wreckage in this race is worthy of the Roman circus, but this poetic account was credible – and entertaining – to Greeks in the fifth century.

Similarly dangerous, the horse race (*keles*) was perhaps 6 laps (c.7,000 meters) long. Slender, youthful jockeys, bareback with no saddle or stirrups but with goads and spurs, are sometimes depicted nude but may not have ridden so. Again, despite the risks and their age, these riders “won” only for their owners.

In time Olympia adjusted to more diversified equestrian events. Perhaps under Sicilian influence, the mule-cart race (*apene*) and a mare or dismounting race (*kalpe* or *anabates*) were introduced in 500 and 496 but discontinued by 444. Later additions included the aforementioned two-horse chariot race (in 408) and three events for colts (in 384, 268, and 256). (On the importance at Olympia of competitors from Greek settlements in Sicily and southern Italy, see Chapter 12.)

7 More Panhellenic Crown Games

During the Archaic period, with colonization, interstate rivalry, ambitious tyrants, and aristocrats’ desire for status display, games proliferated and became thoroughly institutionalized in sanctuaries and city-states. The success of Olympia inspired the addition of contests to festivals held at other Panhellenic sanctuaries: the Pythian Games (sacred to Apollo) at Delphi in 586, the Isthmian Games (sacred to Poseidon) at the Isthmus of Corinth in 580, and the Nemean Games (sacred to Zeus) at Nemea in 573. These three games were carefully scheduled around the Olympics, with Olympia and Delphi on offset four-year cycles and Isthmia and Nemea on staggered two-year cycles. A four-year cycle included six festivals: one Olympic and one Pythian, as well as two each of the Isthmian and Nemean Games. All four had wreath prizes (but of different plants), truces, envoys, and

contests open to all Greeks. Becoming a *periodonikes* or “circuit victor” by winning at all four games of the *periodos* was the height of athletic glory (Miller 2004a: 95–112; Valavanis 2004: 162–335).

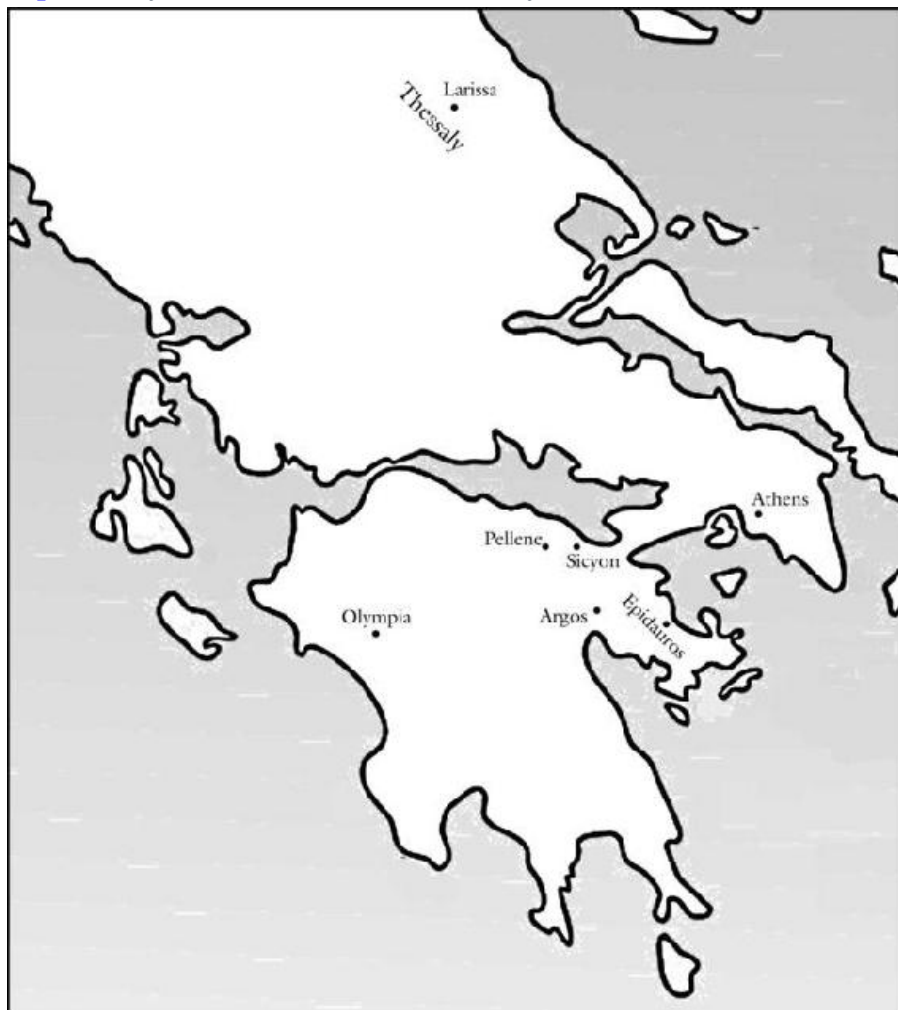
There was no standardized program even among the four crown games of the *periodos*. For example, Olympia and Nemea were both sacred to Zeus, but Nemea apparently had contests in three age categories (boys, youths, and men). Unlike Olympia, Nemea and Isthmia (and Athens and Argos) had a middle distance footrace of four *stadia* (c.700 meters), the *hippios* (Pausanias 6.16.4). The elaborate programs of the Pythian and Isthmian Games shared elements with Olympia but also with each other. The Pythia had musical events, and it adopted some colts’ events well before Olympia. Isthmia had gymnastic events and prominent hippic events but also competitions in music, recitation, and art and, at some point, apparently even a boat race. Although, reportedly, most Greeks could swim, no swimming races are recorded. (For further discussion of the sites of Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea and of the athletic festivals held at those sites, see Chapter 11.)

8 Local or Civic Games

The Panhellenic crown games show us only part of the world of Greek athletics and not the part experienced by most Greeks. Because of the distance and expense, the average athlete or spectator probably did not regularly attend the great Panhellenic festivals but rather went to games held near his or her home. To appreciate the rich variety and vitality of Greek athletics, and to attempt any athletic social history, we need to look beyond the *periodos* to local or civic contests, which conventionally, as noted earlier, are called “chrematitic” games because they awarded prizes of material worth.

Hundreds of city-states and sanctuaries staged games and built public athletic facilities (Miller 2004a: 129–45; Valavanis 2004: 336–97; Kyle 2007: 148–97). Many cities and sanctuaries displayed athletic sculptures and victory dedications, and some issued coins with athletic images to advertise their festivals. Local games usually included some Olympic-style events, but their programs were quite varied, and unlike the crown games, these games awarded valuable prizes. Pindar (*Nemean* 10.22–48, similarly *Olympian* 7.80–7) mentions prizes of bronze shields at Argos, amphorae (large vases) of olive oil at Athens, silver wine cups at Sicyon, and cloaks at Pellene (see [Map 1.2](#) for key locations mentioned in this essay). Cities gave numerous prizes, even second-place and team prizes, because prizes both showed off local wealth and products and enhanced participation and civic pride.

Map 1.2 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



Different games reflected the character of their different states or regions. Known as a center of healing, the sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros also hosted gymnastic, hippic, and musical games from c.520 on. Like the crown festivals, the Asklepieia Games had a stadium, judges, and envoys (Miller 2004a: 129–32; Sève 1993). At wealthy and ambitious Athens the Greater Panathenaic Games had an eclectic program including contests in male beauty, dancing in armor, and a chariot-dismounting race (*apobates*), as well as team and tribal contests (e.g., torch and boat races). Some Panathenaic contests included three age groups and some were restricted to Athenian citizens (see Chapter 10). From the fifth century on festivals at Larissa and other communities in Thessaly (in what is now northern Greece) included standard events and also local events evocative of a land known for horses and cattle: unusual equestrian contests (e.g., a torch

race on horseback, an *apobates* race, and mounting and dismounting competitions) and bull sports (*taurotheria*) in which a horseman pursued a bull, jumped off his horse, grasped the bull by the horns, and wrestled it to the ground (Gallis 1988; Zaphiropoulou 2004). These and other games demonstrate numerous local variations and adaptations within the general pattern of Greek athletics, and their programs and material prizes offered expanded opportunities for athletes.

From whatever class and however mixed their motives, most athletes espoused a traditional, aristocratic athletic value system with themes of effort, virtue, piety, endurance or outlay (*ponos*), and humility (*aidos*) (Pleket 2010: 161–74). Victory brought glorious fame (*kleos*), but it was to be tempered by humility and an appreciation of divine favor (*charis*). Greek athletes, nevertheless, were not opposed to profiting from their victories. Without amateur restrictions, athletes competed freely in both stephanitic and chrematitic games, gathering glory and gains at will. Theagenes of Thasos, Olympic victor in 480 and 476, supposedly won some 1,400 victories (Pausanias 6.11.2–9). Home cities rewarded Olympic victors with cash bonuses, free meals, and honors. Athenian Olympic victors got 500 *drachmai* from the state, worth perhaps US\$340,000 today (Young 1984: 7, 107–10, 128–33). Critics (see Chapter 21), to no avail, condemned the adulation and rewards given to athletes, saying they should go to thinkers and virtuous citizens.

Social analysis of athletics is best attempted by focusing on the mass of athletes who were active only locally rather than the handful of stars who competed at the Panhellenic level. We know at best some 25 percent of Olympic victors (Farrington 1997: 24). Perhaps only 200 to 250 athletes competed at each Olympiad (Crowther 1993: 49) and that was only every fourth year. Discerning the class or social mobility of Panhellenic victors (let alone entrants), who often are known only by name and contest, is problematic. We usually do not know the resources or class of the family, or whether they were well-off before or because of their victories.

We have better evidence for athletes competing at home in states such as Athens and Sparta. As Nigel Crowther (2004: 181) states, “the number of competitors was much larger in local festivals than in the crown games.” Large numbers of youths at Athens participated in team or tribal torch races and in choral dances, which were financed by the state or selected benefactors. Young athletes with familial resources for training and travel might consider pursuing athletic competition at a higher level but only after testing themselves and succeeding locally. Most probably ceased to compete formally and publicly in early adulthood, turning thereafter to exercise in the

gymnasion for purposes of health, appearance, social interaction, status display, or readiness to assist the state in warfare. Sporting experiences, then, for most Greeks began in and centered on their own community.

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 See Chapter 4 in this volume for further discussion of the use of athletic metaphors in Greek literature.
- 3 The terms “stephanitic” and “chrematitic” are based upon fourth-century BCE literary usage, but I acknowledge that these terms may suggest an oversimplified typology for Greek athletic festivals. They imply that the prize given is the criterion of status and categorization rather than the prestige of the games. Also, the terms do not correspond to technical terminology in later papyrological and epigraphic documents for Hellenistic and imperial contests. See Pleket 2004 and Remijsen 2011; but cf. Slater 2012.
- 4 On the ancient Olympics, see Miller 2004a: 11–19, 31–87; Valavanis 2004: 408–41; Young 2004: 24–51; Spivey 2004: 70–124; Kyle 2007: 110–35; Swaddling 2008: 56–89; Potter 2012: 55–88.
- 5 On determining the winner in the pentathlon, see Lee 2001: 40–7; Young 2004: 32–7, 161–4; Kyle 2007: 121–3; Egan 2007.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For an authoritative, illustrated synthesis on Greek athletics, see Miller 2004a. Miller 2004b is an essential collection of translated documents. Golden 2004 is a handy reference work, and Poliakoff 1987 remains essential on combat events.

Scott 2010 is a recent archaeological study of Olympia and Delphi. Lee 2001 thoroughly examines the Olympic program. Christesen 2007a challenges early Olympic dates. Nielsen 2007 contextualizes Olympia in the wider Greek world.

A social historical introduction, Golden 1998 interprets sport as a means of social differentiation. Pleket 2010 uses inscriptions in his seminal article on games, prizes, and athletes. Young 1984 remains an important revisionist study on professionalism and prizes. Nicholson 2005 applies new historicism to the representation of charioteers, jockeys, and trainers. Scanlon 2002 relates athletics to Greek religion, education, gender, sexuality, and social values.

A richly illustrated volume on Panhellenic and local games, Valavanis 2004 emphasizes ties between religion and sport. Kyle 2007 suggests overlapping athletic and spectacular aspects of sport in a broad context. Recent anthologies include Phillips and Pritchard 2003 and Schaus and Wenn 2007. Crowther 2004 collects his valuable articles on aspects of Greek and Roman sport, and König 2010 makes important articles more accessible.

CHAPTER 2

Sport in the Aegean Bronze Age

Jeremy Rutter

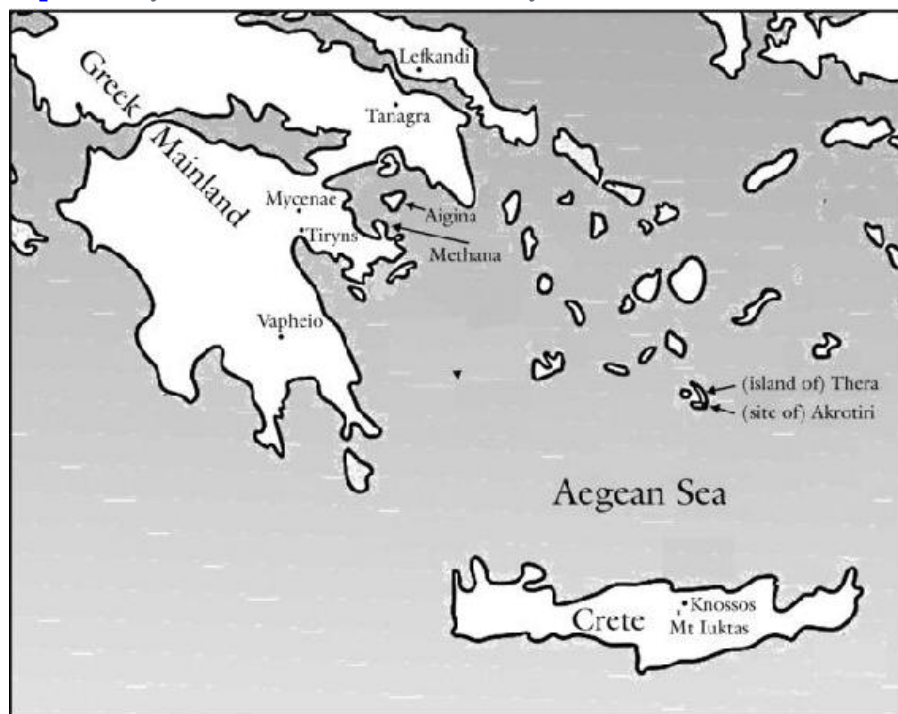
1 Introduction

No written text concerning sport has yet been discovered in any of the various scripts utilized by the Minoan, Cycladic, or Mycenaean cultures of the Aegean Bronze Age (c.3000–c.1100 BCE). Thanks to the extraordinarily rich range of Aegean pictorial art, however, illustrations of Bronze Age sport have survived in substantial numbers.¹ Unfortunately, all too many of the objects that are the vehicles for these depictions are fragmentary, with the result that the more complex compositions that decorated the larger ones are woefully incomplete. Such vagaries of preservation, along with the absence of complementary literary sources, cause considerable disagreement among specialists as to how individual figures and actions are to be restored and interpreted. It is therefore hardly surprising that overviews of Aegean Bronze Age sport differ considerably (Laser 1987; Golden 1998: 28–33; Miller 2004: 20–30; Kyle 2007: 38–53).

Notwithstanding the deficiencies of the basic evidence, detailed study of Aegean Bronze Age sport has much to offer. Depictions of sporting activities begin as early as the end of the third millennium and are quite common in the sixteenth through the twelfth centuries BCE. During those five centuries, the images are deployed on a wide range of objects produced in various materials and scales within at least two and arguably three distinct cultural milieus (Minoan on Crete, Mycenaean on the Greek mainland, and Cycladic in the central Aegean islands, see [Map 2.1](#)), each of which passed through several sociopolitical stages that might have had an impact on the nature and function of the culture's pictorial art. The evidence available thus

lends itself to both cross-cultural (Minoan versus Mycenaean) as well as historical analysis in addition to forcing researchers to confront the basic question of how to investigate a culture's self-representation with respect to sport on the basis of pictorial evidence. For such investigations to produce credible results, however, they must adopt rigorous methodologies including strict attention to chronological differentiation of the evidence, its spatial and sociopolitical contexts, and the functional implications of the artifact forms on which the images in question appear.

Map 2.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



2 Prepalatial Crete (c.3100–c.1950 BCE, Early Minoan I–Middle Minoan IA)

Diachronic surveys of the depictions of sport during the Aegean Bronze Age typically begin with the pair of almost complete terracotta rhyta in the form of bulls from the Prepalatial Minoan tholos tombs at Koumasa and Porti (Younger 1995: 525 nos. 9, 7). Standing 10–15

centimeters high and measuring 15–20 centimeters in length, these ritual pouring or decanting vessels (Koehl 2006: 259–76) were decorated with vertical banding or a rectangular patch of cross-hatching. Hanging onto their horns, and in one case draped lengthwise over the front of the bull's head, are diminutive, belted, but otherwise nude, male figures, three on the three-legged Koumasa vessel and just one preserved on the single surviving horn of the Porti rhyton. A fragment preserving a bull's horn clutched by an incomplete human figure from the peak sanctuary on Mt Iuktas (Younger 1995: 525 no. 8) is evidence for a third such vessel from a cultic but non-funerary context. The broadly cross-hatched rectangle across the back of the Porti vessel has suggested a net to many scholars, the means by which bulls were captured in the wild in later Neopalatial depictions (Koehl 2006: 328). An occasional contemporary and numerous later bull rhyta bear similar netlike decoration (Younger 1995: 525 nos. 14–18; Koehl 2006: 16–17, 72–5 nos. 10, 15–17, 19–23, pls. 1–3), but the small-scale human figures clustered around the bull's head disappear after the Prepalatial era. These vessels presumably functioned as dispensers of libations, possibly in connection with the sacrifice of captured bulls (Koehl 2006: 327–9) and mostly in the context of public funerary rituals, to judge from the contexts of their discovery in areas adjacent to but outside of the actual tombs. The enormous size of the bulls relative to the male figures hanging from their horns and heads has suggested that bulls of the large and now extinct *Bos primigenius* species are intended, bones of which have in fact been recovered from Minoan excavation contexts at the sites of Tylissos and Chania (Marinatos 1993: 291 n. 61; Hallager and Hallager 1995: 557). Most commentators see in these early rhyta the first manifestation of the Minoans' later well-known predilection for bull-related sports (e.g., Marinatos 1989, 1994), although the few terracotta rhyta to which human figures are attached date at least four centuries earlier than the abundant Neopalatial depictions of bull vaulting and bull grappling, with no apparent continuity in the iconography of bull sports during the intervening Protopalatial era and thus no clear indication that the Prepalatial and Neopalatial activities are connected, or if so, how.

3 Protopalatial Crete (c.1950– c.1750 BCE, Middle Minoan IB–

IIB)

Illustrations of activities that can be described as sport are extremely rare during the Protopalatial period in Crete despite the notable rise in the overall quantity of representational art. Thus the depiction of a male acrobat performing a backward somersault found on a sword pommel from the palace at Malia and dating to late in this period assumes considerable importance (Pelon 1985). Despite its excellent preservation, there is unfortunately nothing in the depiction of this figure to inform us as to the physical or social context in which it may have taken place. The acrobat's costume differs appreciably from that of later bull jumpers, and the date of the piece (Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993: 18 nos. 32–3 for the swords from the same context) suggests that it ought to be viewed as part of a wave of Egyptian influence that had a clear impact on several different Minoan pictorial media toward the end of the Protopalatial era (Immerwahr 1985).²

4 Neopalatial Crete (c.1750–c.1450 BCE, Middle Minoan IIIA–Late Minoan IB)

The explosion of pictorialism that characterizes the Neopalatial era introduces figured murals as well as stone vessels decorated with representational scenes in relief to the repertoire of Minoan representational art. Illustrations of sporting activities appear in both of these new media and also make an appearance in more rarely documented materials such as painted rock crystal (Younger 1995: 534–5 no. 116; Evans 1930: 108–11, figs. 60–1, pl. XIX) and small-scale ivory sculpture in the round (Evans 1930: figs. 294–300; Lapatin 2001: 21–37). The vast majority of the roughly 100 different objects or surfaces decorated with Neopalatial sporting images feature scenes of bull leaping, bull vaulting, bull grappling, and bull catching (Younger 1995: 524–35, 539–41), but some 10–20% depict scenes of unarmed combat, usually identified as boxing but perhaps also including a form of wrestling, between pairs of youthful males (Coulomb 1981; Militello 2003: 359–77, 395–6). There are also a handful of images of acrobats doing handstands (Shaw 1995: 112 n. 81; Hood 1978: 228 figs. 231–2; *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel* I 131, I *Supp.* 169a, III 166a, VI 184) and a couple that illustrate runners possibly engaged in some form of competition

Aside from two famous gold cups from the tholos tomb at Vapheio,⁴ all the complex compositions of sporting scenes in Neopalatial art are highly fragmentary, with the result that what they actually show is often as much debated as their larger significance. A high percentage of the depictions of bull-related sports consist of images executed at a miniature scale on carved sealstones and signet rings that typically include just two or three figures (Younger 1995: 539–41). Yet even when images of comparable activities are executed at significantly larger scales in relief on stone vases, in painted plaster, or at life size in stucco relief, they may often have been as sparsely composed, as is likely to have been the case with respect to sculptural groups executed in mixed materials including ivory (*pace* Evans 1930: 428, 435; see Lapatin 2001: 23–4).

Neopalatial bull sports (usefully surveyed in Younger 1995; Scanlon 1999; and Panagiotopoulos 2006) appear to have been performed largely, indeed perhaps exclusively, at Knossos (Shaw 1995: 98–104, 113–19; Hallager and Hallager 1995). The scheduling and frequency of these performances are unknown but are suspected of having been regular but only occasional (Younger 1995: 521–3). Exactly where at Knossos the performances took place and whether or not the venue was always the same are likewise uncertain (Younger 1995: 512–15; Panagiotopoulos 2006: 130–1), but a better case can presently be made for a location outside of the palace proper than within it, perhaps to the west and north of the West Court as proposed by Shaw (1996: 186–9, fig. 7).

The identity of the leapers has attracted perhaps more scholarly attention than any other facet of this distinctive sporting activity, chiefly because of the widespread and persistent conviction among commentators that the red and white skin colors of the jumpers depicted in the (somewhat later) Taureador fresco indicate that jumpers of both sexes participated in this dangerous pastime (Younger 1995: 515–16; Panagiotopoulos: 128–9). Alberti, however, following up on comments by Damiani Indelicato (1988) and others, has pointed out the extent to which seemingly standard skin-color conventions for the sexes are ignored by Knossian artists and has drawn attention to how leapers in the Taureador fresco are individualized through the decoration of their breechcloths, their jewelry, their gestures, and probably even their heights (Alberti 2002: 103–4, 111–12). Gender evidently does not play a role in a leaper's identity. The absence of any evidence for female jumpers in other media such as ivory carving supports the view that all bull jumpers were, in fact, male, and that the distinction between red-skinned and white-skinned bull jumpers

and bull grapplers in some paintings at Knossos, and perhaps also in contemporary Minoanizing frescoes at Tell Dab'a-Avaris in the eastern Nile Delta (Bietak, Marinatos, Palivou, *et al.* 2007), has some significance other than sexual differentiation.

On present evidence, only when a painting was executed with figures at a miniature scale was the setting of bull sports represented. At least three such compositions may once have existed in the palace at Knossos (Shaw 1995: 102, 117–18): (1) the so-called Ivory Deposit fresco in which a bull (but unfortunately no preserved leapers) and an architectural façade appear, together with which fragments of at least four ivory human figures were found, some of them certainly male bull jumpers (Evans 1930: 397–435; Shaw 1995: 118, fig. 8:F, 1996: 182); (2) a collection of fresco fragments from below the thirteenth magazine that includes one with a bull's head and the flying tresses of a leaper plus other pieces depicting a crowd of spectators and also an architectural façade (Shaw 1995: 117–18, fig. 8:B, 1996: 183–4, pl. 36b–d; for Cameron's 1974 reconstruction of this composition within a large panel, Bietak, Marinatos, Palivou, *et al.* 2007: 89 fig. 90); and (3) the Grandstand and Sacred Grove frescoes depicting crowds, a complex architectural façade including a tripartite shrine, and an exterior court, but no bulls or leapers actually preserved (Davis 1987; Shaw 1995: 118, fig. 8:C; 1996: 185–8, pl. 37). The importance of the thirteenth magazine fragments for the evidence they provide of the combination of bull leaping, spectating crowd, and architectural setting within a single composition is enormous inasmuch as they furnish strong support for the unifying social function of bull jumping within what are likely to have been public spaces immediately adjacent to the Knossian palace (Panagiotopoulos 2006: 130–3).

Discoveries during the 1990s of bull-jumping activities illustrated on a Hittite relief-decorated cult vessel found at Hüseyindede in Anatolia and dated to the sixteenth century BCE (Sipahi 2001) and in early fifteenth-century BCE frescoes from Tell Dab'a in the eastern Nile Delta (Bietak, Marinatos, Palivou, *et al.* 2007), along with the publication of similar activities on long-known and even older seals from Syria (Collon 1994), have shown bull-related sports to be widespread among eastern Mediterranean cultures and to have putative ancestors in Egypt and Anatolia (Morenz 2000). While some examples of such events in art are clearly derived from Minoan models (for example, those depicted in the Tell Dab'a murals), others appear to differ in most respects from Minoan representations and may have little or no connection with the bull sports developed on Crete. It therefore seems unwarranted to claim that Hittite material supporting an interpretation of such activities as principally religious in character should be applied to Minoan bull sports (Taracha 2002: 19), especially

when most commentators are inclined to view the Minoan practices as initiation rituals undertaken by youthful Minoan males whose decorated breechcloths, fancy jewelry, and elaborate hairstyles identify them as members of the Cretan elite (Säflund 1987; Alberti 2002). The stress on crowds of spectators witnessing these events that seems to be a feature of some miniature-style frescoes from Knossos further suggests that the staging of these spectacles constituted an important ingredient in promoting societal cohesion on Neopalatial Crete as Minoan culture became increasingly subject to the dominance of Knossos.

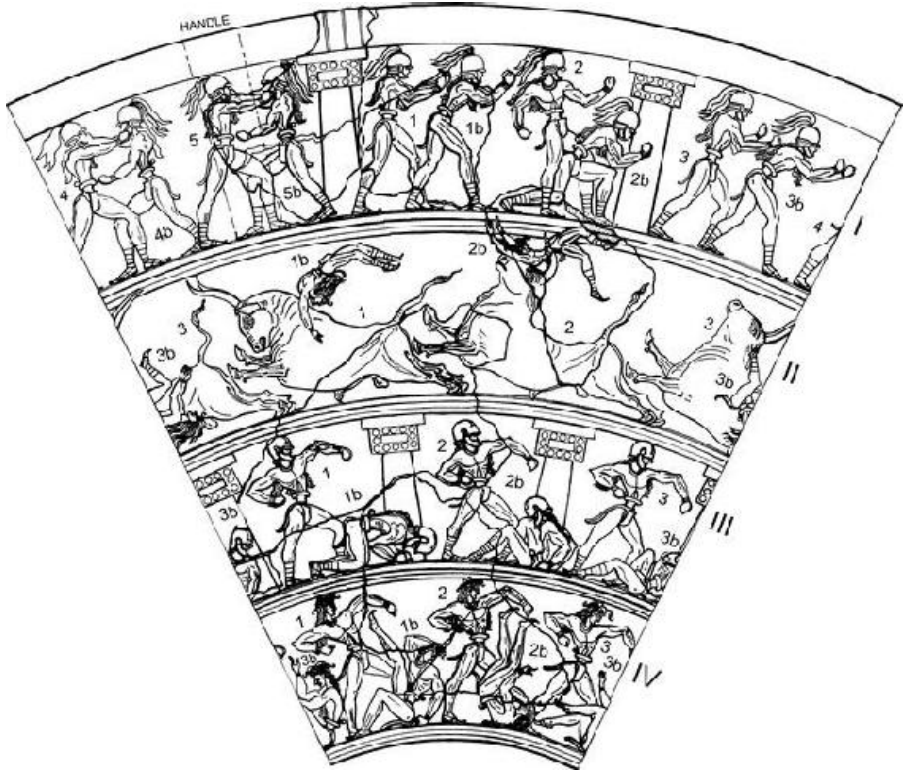
Whereas bull-jumping events appear to have been hosted only at Knossos in the Neopalatial era, and therefore may have become an emblem of Knossian political power on items such as gold rings (Shaw 1995: 104–5), unarmed combat between pairs of young males, though much less commonly illustrated, was seemingly practiced more widely as well as more variably (Coulomb 1981). A single, almost fully restorable, wall painting from Room B1 at Akrotiri on the island of Thera shows two young boys between the ages of 6 and 10 in active combat, each outfitted with a single dark glove on his right hand (Dumas 1992: 108–15, figs. 78–81; Morgan 1995; Chapin 2007: 240–1, 251–2, figs. 12.6–12.7). The two boys are purposefully juxtaposed with two antelopes on an adjacent wall, one of a trio of such antelope pairs that decorated the other walls in this room. The boys' age, in addition to the formal comparison between their activity and the ritualized competition of the two closest antelopes (Morgan 1995: 184), indicates that they are engaged in practice sparring, not violent or destructive combat. The clear status difference between the victorious boy on the left, conspicuously outfitted with elaborate jewelry, and his much more plainly attired opponent is matched by an apparent difference in their skill levels: the former effortlessly wards off his antagonist's blow at the same time as he readies a counterpunch. As Nanno Marinatos notes, "the message of the painting is firstly competition through play and secondly establishment of hierarchy: the victor is obvious through posture and adornment with jewelry" (1993: 212).

The contrast with the three different varieties of unarmed combat that decorated three of the four friezes on the famous Boxer Rhyton from Ayia Triadha in Crete (see [Figure 2.1](#)) could not be greater. Differences in equipment (principally headgear and footgear) worn by the combatants in each of friezes I, III, and IV (counting from top to bottom, as in Robert Koehl's new reconstruction (2006: 164–6, Frontispiece, fig. 29, pl. 41)) suggest that different rules may apply to the combat events illustrated, just as the presence of columnar supports topped by capitals in only two of the three (I, III) may hint at

different venues for their staging. Although the highly fragmentary state of the rhyton's preservation precludes certainty on this point, it is likely that each of the three lower friezes (II–IV) depicted three pairs of antagonists; in every case where the preservation allows a determination to be made, the victor is clearly identified.

The Boxer Rhyton is by no means the only Neopalatial stone vessel to have been decorated with scenes of sport, but it is the only such vessel to consist of more than a single fragment. At least five additional rhyta, all found at Knossos, bore scenes of boxing (Koehl 2006: 180 no. 766), bull jumping (Koehl 2006: 181 no. 770), either one or the other of these two activities or perhaps simple acrobatics (Koehl 2006: 180–1 nos. 767–8, pl. 47), and possibly competitive running (Koehl 2006: 180 no. 765, pl. 47). Rhyta in the Neopalatial and subsequent Monopalatial eras are carried only by male figures in Aegean art (Koehl 2006: 336). Furthermore, such human figures as appear on stone rhyta decorated in relief with pictorial scenes are exclusively male (Warren 1969: 174–81). These facts, in addition to the specific pictorial content appearing on some of these vessels, have led Koehl to interpret the images on several of the best preserved examples, including the Boxer Rhyton, as illustrations of male initiation rituals (2000, 2006: 335–7). The deployment of sporting imagery on this particular artifact form on objects produced exclusively at Knossos and intended for male usage strongly supports the evidence provided by the Neopalatial frescoes decorated with similar imagery (Shaw 1995), although nothing indicates that this iconography need be specifically royal in character (*contra* Marinatos 2007). The artifact categories on which this imagery is principally employed, though all of elite character, put no emphasis on royal personages but rather highlight the physical aspirations and achievements of what appear to be Knossian society's elite male youth (Säflund 1987; Koehl 2000). Competition is pervasive in this art, but there are no depictions whatsoever of rewards for victory.

Figure 2.1 Restored line drawing of the Boxer Rhyton, c.1550–1500BCE. *Source:* From R. Koehl, *Aegean Bronze Age Rhyta*, frontispiece, image courtesy of INSTAP Academic Press. Used with permission.



5 Monopalatial Crete (c.1450–c.1375 BCE, Late Minoan II–IIIA1)

Following the destruction of most palatial structures and virtually all known outlying “villas” on Crete within a fairly short space of time during the early fifteenth century BCE, the single surviving palace at Knossos flourished under an administration that maintained its records in Mycenaean Greek in the Linear B script for a period of two to three generations before itself falling victim to a wholesale destruction by fire that put an end to that site’s short-lived but seemingly uncontested dominance (hence the term “Monopalatial” for the timespan). Even more than had been true during the later stages of the preceding Neopalatial era, the production of most classes of pictorial art on Crete during this Monopalatial period was concentrated at or near Knossos. Among these are such famous murals as the Taureador fresco (the most fully preserved of all fresco

renderings of bull-leaping activity (Marinatos and Palivou 2007)) and a relief-decorated ivory pyxis (Hood 1978: 121–2, fig. 111) that depicts a monstrously large bull being hunted and simultaneously either grappled with or vaulted by three youths in a rural landscape. This pyxis, clearly indebted with respect to technique and subject matter to Neopalatial predecessors such as the twin gold cups found at Vapheio and stone rhyta manufactured at Knossos, presents us with a thus far unique composition of bull hunting and bull jumping in the wild that has its closest analogue in the Violent Cup from Vapheio.

Within each of the constituent panels of the Taureador fresco (of which Marinatos and Palivou (2007: figs. 104, 107–9, 112) have identified a minimum of five) a single bull charging from right to left is matched against a pair or trio of bull jumpers and bull grapplers. The removal from this compositional schema of all landscape and architectural elements as well as any indication of spectators may signal a profound change at this time in the display of bull-related activities in Aegean art, but the surviving evidence is unfortunately too exiguous to allow for anything resembling certainty on this point.

After the destruction by fire of the palace at Knossos early in the fourteenth century, the production of seals (a signet with a raised or incised emblem used to stamp an impression on substances such as unfired clay or perhaps wax) in hard stones appears to have come to an end while that of gold signet rings declined markedly. As a consequence, very few depictions of bull jumping on sealstones and signet rings can be assigned dates of production later than roughly 1375 BCE (Younger 1995: 532 no. 98). Prior to this date, however, scenes of bull-related sports continued to be as popular in this medium as they had been in Neopalatial times. Indeed, they perhaps became even more popular in the Monopalatial era (Younger 1995: 539–41).

6 The Palatial Greek Mainland (c.1425–c.1190 BCE, Late Helladic IIIA1–IIIB2)

Broadly contemporary perhaps with the Taureador fresco are less than a dozen fragments of a fresco featuring bull leaping recovered from the strata beneath the Ramp House at Mycenae on the Greek mainland (Shaw 1996: 167–80, color pls. A–B). About half of these can be assigned to two panels containing a large bull, one of them also featuring at least three human figures identifiable as bull jumpers or

bull grapplers. Four further fragments depicting an architectural façade within whose window embrasures are several female spectators may belong to the same composition by virtue of their similar figure scale, but these preserve no portion of the framing border that is a distinctive feature of the bull-jumping panels not only from Mycenae, but also of the Knossian Taureador fresco. It is therefore uncertain whether the spectating women are to be understood as watching the bull-jumping activities within one and the same composition. The Mycenae frescoes securely identified as illustrating bull jumping are remarkably similar in their composition to those of the Monopalatial period at Knossos, even if their figure scale is approximately half that of their Knossian parallels (Shaw 1996: 182 n. 55). Moreover, of the four known or suspected examples of bull-leaping compositions in the fresco art of the Mycenaean Greek mainland (Shaw 1995: 119), the Ramp House fresco at Mycenae is unquestionably the earliest. It would therefore seem likely that the bull-jumping theme was initially distributed from Knossos to Mycenae in the form of fresco art shortly after the Linear B administration was installed at Knossos under the control of what is usually considered to have been a Mycenaean ruler. Only after a century or more was this theme passed along to palatial establishments elsewhere on the Greek mainland.

Neither boxing nor forms of acrobatics other than those performed in the context of bull jumping appear to have survived the Neopalatial collapse on Crete itself. Nor is there any secure evidence for the adoption of boxing or acrobatic iconography directly from the Neopalatial Minoan iconographic repertoire for the purposes of display on the Greek mainland. Instead, a limited number of paired boxers, not always portrayed in actual combat, turn up on a relatively small number of Mycenaean kraters (large vessels for mixing wine) found in tombs on Cyprus (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: 43–4, 202 V.28–32).⁵ Broadly contemporary and also from Cypriot contexts are two Mycenaean kraters depicting bull leaping (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: 25, 197 III.31 and 48, 203 V.48). A krater in Boston (USA), from an unknown locale on Cyprus, yet surely recovered from a tomb, depicts two pairs of males on opposite sides of the vase engaged in the Levantine sport of belt wrestling but with their arms held in much the same position as some of the previously cited boxers (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: 39, 201 V.14). No other evidence for this particular version of unarmed combat is known from the Aegean, so this may have been an item of iconography inserted specifically to appeal to a Cypriot or other Levantine consumer.

Only two Mycenaean pictorially decorated vessels of the palatial era illustrating sporting events – a krater sherd plausibly depicting a

pair of boxers confronting each other (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: 93, 212 IX.17) and a rhyton sherd featuring a helmeted bull jumper in mid-leap over the back of a bull (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: 93–4, 212 IX.18.1) – have been found on the Greek mainland, both in settlement contexts at Mycenae. A third pictorial fragment, a krater sherd showing parts of two males confronting each other, at least one of them seemingly armored and both with a single arm raised, has been identified in the past as depicting boxers (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: 93, 212 IX.18) but more probably represents saluting warriors (Crouwel 1991: 16 B1, pl. 1).

So far as Mycenaean pictorial vase painting is concerned,⁶ it seems legitimate to conclude from this survey of the surviving evidence that vessels with scenes of sport were intended primarily for viewing audiences on the island of Cyprus (van Wijngaarden 2002: 183–202). Moreover, within such Cypriot contexts, scenes of sport appeared overwhelmingly on kraters designed for the mixing of wine with water for the purposes of communal consumption in small to medium-sized groups, although smaller numbers of open vessels from which wine would have been consumed by individuals (kylikes, bowls) were also sometimes decorated with such scenes. On the Greek mainland, pictorially ornamented ceramic vessels of the palatial era bearing scenes of sport are few and far between and have thus far been found exclusively at Mycenae, with the single exception of a well-known larnax from Tanagra Tomb 22 (Younger 1976: 133 III.2, 1995: 531 no. 84).

If one considers the vase-painting evidence in concert with that for scenes of sport in Mycenaean mural paintings, one might hazard a guess that depictions of bull-related sports in painting were intended for royal consumption only. The small number of vessels decorated with this iconography that were exported to Cyprus may thus conceivably have been royal gifts, the products of an industry centered in the kingdom of Mycenae (Åkerström 1987; Mommsen and Maran 2000/1), which we now know, from numerous programs of chemical analysis (e.g., Zuckerman, Ben-Shlomo, Mountjoy, *et al.* 2010), produced by far the largest percentage of Mycenaean decorated pottery exported to Cyprus and the Levant from any production center on the Greek mainland. The same royal monopoly that applied to depictions of bull jumping may likewise have covered scenes of boxing, although in the case of that sport there is no indication in Mycenaean fresco art that this subject was restricted to royal residences. In his publication of the large quantities of pictorial pottery recovered from one, if not the chief, production center of Mycenaean pottery of this kind during the palatial era, Åkerström

argued that the comparatively few figures identified as boxers in Mycenaean vase painting had been taken over from personages identified as “grooms” and simple “attendants” in Syrian and Egyptian New Kingdom art and in his opinion had nothing to do with boxing at all (1987: 79–83). In rejecting Åkerström’s arguments, Benzi (1999: 221–2) nevertheless concedes that the Mycenaean approach to portraying boxers in painting is quite different from that of earlier Neopalatial depictions on Crete, especially in opting for a more balanced, emblematic, or heraldic presentation of the combatants rather than putting emphasis on the moment of victory that figures so prominently on the Boxer Rhyton. Mycenaean boxers thus lend themselves to being interpreted as the providers of entertainment at social occasions when the kraters and other drinking vessels on which they appeared were put into use, that is, as hirelings of an elite for whom the pictorial kraters were produced rather than as themselves members of the elite going through some form of initiation, as has been argued to have been the case for Minoan boxers.

The relatively recent discovery *in situ* in a fourteenth to thirteenth century BCE shrine building at Ayios Konstantinos on Methana of three fragmentary but largely restorable terracotta figurines depicting single, presumably male human figures standing on the shoulders of bulls, their forward-facing heads framed within the curving arc of the horns that they grasp with both hands, has come as something of a surprise (Konsolaki-Yiannopoulou 2003a: 377–8, figs. 10–12). Though similar figurine groups have long been known from single examples in museums in Lefkosia (Cyprus) and Princeton (USA), these parallels lacked proveniences of any kind, while fragments of potentially comparable figurines from Mycenae and the Aphaia sanctuary on Aigina derive from fills that provided no significant information concerning the original usage of the objects to which they had belonged (Konsolaki-Yiannopoulou 2003a: 377 ns. 13, 15–17). Found together with substantial numbers of other comparatively unusual multigure terracotta groups (e.g., chariots, ridden horses, and ox-drawn carts), the bull-jumping groups from Methana have been interpreted as evidence for the worship of a male divinity associated with bulls and horses. The association of bull jumping with cult at this remote Mycenaean sanctuary has no obvious connections with either Minoan or Mycenaean palatial practices, although it is tempting to suggest that these terracotta groups were produced at and distributed from either Mycenae or Tiryns, the nearest palatial centers to the Ayios Konstantinos shrine.

The complex iconography decorating a larnax (rectangular chest) evidently reused as an ossuary in Chamber Tomb 22 at Tanagra has been subjected to detailed analysis by Mario Benzi with the aim of

testing Decker's earlier thesis that several of the scenes represented are to be understood as depictions of Homeric-style funeral games held for the child shown being lowered into his coffin (Decker 1987; Benzi 1999: 215–17, figs. 1–2a). What Decker took to be an armed duel observed by the multiple occupants of two antithetically disposed chariots in the lower register of one long side, Benzi reinterprets, to my mind compellingly, as a boxing scene (1999: 219–22). He subsequently draws attention to the various unique features of the bull-jumping scene that appears in a comparable position on the opposite long side: three bulls standing stationary, each with a human vaulter positioned horizontally above its back, while the horns of the two antithetically posed bulls are grasped by an off-axis "master of animals" figure (1999: 226–9). Why should scenes such as these have decorated the burial container of a child or adolescent who, to judge from the modest grave goods recovered from the tomb, did not possess any particularly elevated status within the community buried around him (or her) in dozens of other tombs nor even within the smaller social group interred in the same tomb? The painted decoration of this terracotta sarcophagus is exceptional in so many ways that Benzi must be correct in viewing it as an object made to order for a particular individual (1999: 229–31). There is no good reason to assign a specifically funerary interpretation to the sporting activities illustrated on it, especially when the activities in question (bull jumping and boxing, for example) have no specifically funerary connections in an Aegean Bronze Age context. Most of the events associated with later Iron Age funeral games are conspicuous by their absence (see Chapter 3 in this volume). For example, there is nothing in the two chariots carrying multiple passengers and facing in opposite directions on one side of the Tanagra chest to suggest a chariot race. Benzi concludes that the larnax's iconography may have been connected with the youngster buried within it through the initiation rituals that are represented by the sporting events depicted, even though the actors in these events all look to be adults rather than either children or adolescents. There is no simple answer to the interpretative problems posed by this unique artifact, but Benzi performs a genuine service by casting Decker's view of it as an illustration of Bronze Age funeral games (for which there continues to be no compelling evidence on either Crete or the Greek mainland, apart from Homer's epic narrative) into serious doubt. In view of how unusual larnakes are as burial containers on the Mycenaean mainland in the first place, it is perhaps not surprising that the iconography decorating some of them should be equally peculiar.

7 The Postpalatial Aegean (c.1190–c.1020 BCE)

With the destruction of all known Mycenaean palaces within a couple of decades at the beginning of the twelfth century BCE, several major changes took place in the production and consumption of Mycenaean pictorial art (Rutter 1992; Maran 2006). Two of these merit special attention for the impact they had on depictions of sport. First, the ranges of materials and artifact categories that had been vehicles for pictorialism during the preceding era shrank dramatically, with the result that within a generation or less Mycenaean pictorial art was virtually restricted to painted pottery. Seal production had already declined considerably in both qualitative and quantitative terms after the destruction of Knossos c.1375 BCE; in the twelfth century and for three centuries thereafter, it ceased altogether (Krzyszkowska 2005: 232–5). Walls likewise ceased to be decorated with representational scenes in painted plaster, the number of pictorially decorated ivory objects declined precipitously, and neither weaponry nor containers produced in stone or metal were ornamented with representational images.

Second, many of the specific motifs that had been widely deployed in Mycenaean palatial art and that may be considered the basic elements of a royal iconography – boar's tusk helmets, figure-of-eight shields, apotropaic creatures such as lions, sphinxes, and griffins – disappear so abruptly with the palatial collapse that their elimination from the pictorial record comes across as a purposeful rejection of the sociopolitical system in which they had flourished and for which they had become symbolic.⁷ In their stead, new forms of weaponry and altogether new scenes appear in Aegean art, the latter especially during a mid-twelfth-century pictorial renaissance that illustrates an altogether different Aegean society organized around significantly smaller, more highly differentiated, and probably also much shorter-lived polities (Dickinson 2009).

As far as illustrations of sport are concerned, these momentous changes resulted, not surprisingly, in the total disappearance from the pictorial record of bull-related sports and unarmed combat in the form of boxing, both argued to have been activities closely associated with, if not actually restricted to, palatial settings in the Mycenaean world. By far the most popular themes of twelfth-century Mycenaean art are warfare and the hunt, but also included are scenes of dancing and singing and at least one and perhaps as many as three examples of chariot racing, the first depictions of this activity in Aegean art (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: 126, 128, 221 XI.19, XI.37, 230

Thus far, such depictions of vehicular racing are the only clearly identifiable illustrations of sport known from the Postpalatial Bronze Age Aegean. In its choice not merely of an alternative iconography, but also of a completely different variety of physical competition based upon the strength and speed of multiple expensive animals and costly conveyances, the society that sponsored such races reveals itself to have been fundamentally aristocratic in nature, moreover one that reveled in the competition between several rather than just two contestants. Such a society is precisely that of the Homeric epics, so it is perhaps logical that vase painters of the twelfth century privileged the same kind of sporting competition as did Homer by making the chariot race particularly emblematic of their respective eras.

The one certain and two possible illustrations of chariot races respectively decorate a collar-necked jar from Tiryns⁸ and two kraters, one from Tiryns and one from Lefkandi. No longer are such scenes of sport in vase painting restricted to the single site of Mycenae as in palatial times; nor are they exported to Cyprus. The social, political, and economic circumstances of the Postpalatial Aegean were entirely different from those of just a century before. Just as scenes of warfare and the hunt were helpful iconographical tools during the turbulent years of the twelfth century as the decoration of communal drinking vessels used by local elites residing at sites such as Mycenae, Tiryns, Lefkandi, and Kynos to strengthen the social bonds between themselves and their comrades in arms, so depictions of the high-end sporting events in which only members of the elite warrior class of this era could participate serve the same purpose. The nature of the times dictated to a marked degree not only the preferred form of sport, but also the social venue in which images of this sport would be displayed. So it had been in the Bronze Age Aegean since Prepalatial times, and the artifactual vehicles for these sports' depictions consequently assumed very different forms depending on the particular sociopolitical circumstances that prevailed at any one moment in time.

NOTES

- 1 Over the past three decades, an explosion of publications relating to Aegean Bronze Age sport has made clear how abundant the pictorial evidence is. Lists of the depictions of bull-related sports (Younger 1976, 1995), boxing and other forms of unarmed combat (Coulomb 1981; Benzi 1999: 219–22; Militello 2003: 359–77, 395–6), possible running and throwing events (Lebessi, Muhly, and

Papasavvas 2004; Rystedt 1986, 1988), chariot racing (Kilian 1980; Crouwel 1981: 77, 119–20, 139, 142; Güntner 2000: 181 nos. 172 and 181, 195–6), and acrobats or tumbling (Demakopoulou 1989: 111–12) provide ready access to images.

2 The later LM IA dating proposed more recently by Demakopoulou (1989: 111–12 no. 5) is not supported by any reliable evidence.

3 I am grateful to John Younger for the references to these four Neopalatial seals as well as for drawing my attention to the gold ring from Kato Syme published by Lebessi, Muhly, and Papasavvas 2004.

4 Vapheio is located near the later site of Sparta on the Greek mainland. One of the two cups in question, the so-called Quiet Cup, has been interpreted as the work of a Neopalatial Minoan artisan that inspired the production of a thematically linked piece (the Violent Cup) by a mainland Greek artisan (Davis 1977: 1–50, 256–8 nos. 103–4).

5 Three bowl and kylix fragments from Kition and Kourion, apparently all from settlement contexts, may have shown similar boxing pairs, although in these cases only portions of single figures with arms upraised in appropriate positions survive (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982: 44, 202 V.33–5).

6 Attempts (see Rystedt 1986, 1988) to identify competitions in running or even in spear throwing on a dozen Mycenaean pictorial kraters of LH IIIA–B date (nine from Cyprus, one each from Ugarit, near Apterā on Crete, and Corinth) have thus far not been sufficiently compelling to persuade skeptics that such activities flourished as actual sports in the Late Bronze Age Aegean.

7 These royal creatures survive only at Lefkandi in scenes where they have been converted from fearsome apotropaic beasts to caring parents in a series of scenes that seem to be conscious parodies of their earlier palatial usages (Crouwel 2006: 243–4, 254 G1, pl. 67; 244–5, 254 G2, pls. 68, 70; 242, 251 C3a–b, pl. 62).

8 Vermeule and Karageorghis (1982: 230) identify the footed object below the enthroned female figure on the Tirynthian jar as “a krater . . . set on a ringstand by the throne.” Crouwel (2006: 241 and n. 72) comments that the enthroned female “figure is accompanied by, or perhaps actually seated on, a tripod cauldron.” It seems quite possible that the krater or tripod cauldron next to the throne on the Tirynthian jar may have been intended to be viewed as a prize for the winner of the race. Vessels of this kind are, after all, routinely illustrated as prizes in scenes of sporting competitions of various kinds in Late Geometric and Archaic Greek as well as Etruscan art. If correctly identified, this would be the earliest athletic prize to be

illustrated in Greek art.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Summaries of the evidence for Minoan and Mycenaean sport are often included in the early chapters of books presenting general histories of Greek sport (e.g., Miller 2004: 20–30; Kyle 2007: 38–53). Most of the scholarship on Bronze Age Aegean sport, however, takes the form of specialized periodical literature or papers published in the proceedings of academic conferences, much of it in languages other than English (mostly modern Greek, Italian, German, and French). In view of the purely pictorial nature of the evidence, most treatments of prehistoric Aegean sport are closely connected with the description and analysis either of specific artistic media (e.g., painting or small-scale carving) or else of individual works of art.

In English, a useful overall introduction to Aegean art of the third and second millennia BCE is Hood 1978. For wall painting, see Immerwahr 1990; for seals and signet rings, Krzyszkowska 2005; for stone vases, Warren 1969; for vase painting, Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982, supplemented by more focused works authored by Crouwel (1991, 2006) and Sakellarakis 1992. For bull-related sports,

the best places to begin are the essays by Younger (1976, 1995), supplemented by works on the most relevant frescoes written by Shaw (1995, 1996) and collected in Bietak, Marinatos, Palivou, *et al.* 2007. For boxing, the most useful titles in English are Koehl's 2006 book on rhyta and Chapin's helpful 2007 conference paper on how to assess the age of youthful males in Aegean art. Chariot racing is best investigated through Crouwel's definitive 1981 study of Aegean chariotry. Whether or not running and spear throwing were formal sporting pursuits of the Mycenaeans is explored by Rystedt (1986, 1988).

A full-length treatment of all aspects of Aegean Bronze Age sport that takes cognizance of the constantly growing body of pictorial evidence now at our disposal and at the same time pays appropriate attention to significant chronological shifts and cultural differences within the multiethnic environment represented by the Aegean world in the second millennium BCE has yet to be written.

CHAPTER 3

Sport in the Early Iron Age and Homeric Epic

Timothy P. J. Perry

1 Introduction

Following the collapse of Mycenaean civilization in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BCE and the subsequent Submycenaean period (c.1125–c.1050 BCE) Greece entered a period sometimes known as the Dark Ages. Archaeological studies of the last half-century or so have revealed that these Dark Ages were not as dark as had previously been imagined, but it is nevertheless true that much that had marked Mycenaean civilization as culturally advanced was lost in Greece for a period of two or three centuries. For our purposes, the greatest of these losses was pictorial art, a rich source of information for the sporting practices of Mycenaean and Minoan cultures (see Chapter 2 in this volume). By comparison, the loss of writing during the Dark Ages is of less consequence to those interested in the history of Greek sport, since the Linear B script of the Mycenaeans, a purely administrative script, was never used to record or describe sporting practices.

The main obstacle, then, to any investigation into sport in Greece in the Early Iron Age (c.1100–c.700 BCE) is the nature of the sources. In fact, for most of this period we have no contemporary sources on sport at all. In terms of material culture, it is only in the eighth century that sport begins to reappear as a subject in Greek art, especially vase painting. The earliest inscriptional evidence for the awarding and dedicating of prizes in athletic contests is roughly contemporary. Literary descriptions of sport also begin to appear at about the same time; the half-century between 725 BCE and 675 BCE

seems to have been the period in which Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, each of which contains extended descriptions of athletic contests, achieved the basic – if not final – forms in which they have survived to the present. The evidence of these poems can be supplemented by the briefer testimony of the near-contemporary poet Hesiod.

Neither the literary nor visual sources, however, give us a clear or complete picture of sporting practices. Sport in the visual art of this period tends to be depicted in isolation from other activities; while art can tell us that sport was certainly part of Early Iron Age life and what particular sports were played, it does less well at answering questions about who was playing sport, in what social contexts, and how regularly. Literary descriptions confirm that sport was a normal part of life and potentially provide more information about who participated and in what contexts. The use of Homeric poetry to reconstruct the sporting practices of eighth- and seventh-century Greece is nonetheless severely hampered by the fact that the exact relationship between literary depictions of sport and historical realities remains an open question.

2 Sport in the Material Culture of the Early Iron Age

2.1 *Vase painting*

The representation of the human figure, common in the Bronze Age, was absent from Greek art for much of the Early Iron Age and only reappeared with any frequency in the eighth century. A variety of scenes involving human figures can be found in the vase painting of this period, the most frequent being those depicting funerary practices or fighting on land or sea. Scenes depicting sport, though somewhat less frequent, can nevertheless be recognized on a number of vases. Indeed, in terms of material culture, vase painting provides by far the most abundant evidence for sport in the eighth century.

Potentially the most frequently represented sporting activity in eighth-century vase painting is chariot racing. This is only potentially the case because, while chariots are commonly represented, with most depictions occurring on large amphorae and kraters used as grave markers (see [Figure 3.1](#) for an example), distinguishing chariot races from other contexts in which chariots might appear is not a simple

task.¹ Some details, such as a single charioteer dressed in robes (rather than armor) or the presence of tripods (which were regularly used as prizes in athletic contests), suggest chariot *racing*. Others, such as the presence of warriors on foot or of two occupants (an armed warrior and a driver), suggest either battle scenes or the procession associated with the *prothesis* (laying out of a body at a funeral) of a prominent individual, the latter possibility becoming all the more likely when (as is frequently the case) a vase depicts the *prothesis* of the deceased individual whose grave it marked.

The most likely candidates for racing scenes are, of course, those depictions that include only racing details. These most frequently take the form of vases decorated with a series of chariots each occupied by a single, robe-wearing driver whose path is unimpeded by other figures (e.g., Davison 1961: figs. 48a–b, 49, 54–5, 57, 59, 77, etc.). The situation is complicated, however, by the fact that a number of vases include features that suggest racing alongside features that do not. For example, an amphora in the British Museum (Davison 1961: fig. 102) shows robe-wearing charioteers, which suggests racing, accompanied by armed warriors on foot, which does not.²

Despite the problems posed by individual cases such as these, there is little doubt that chariot racing appears not infrequently in eighth-century Greek vase painting.³ It was once widely believed that the chariot-racing scenes in the vase painting of this period were meant to depict specific contests from the mythical past as described in epic poetry (Webster 1955: 41–3). More recently, this view has been strongly, and persuasively, challenged. For a start, the nature of Greek art from this period, which includes neither inscriptions nor the level of detail required to make the identification of individuals possible, precludes the possibility of linking particular scenes with particular myths. Moreover, the vast majority of eighth-century Greek art, as Roller (1981b: 114) points out, represents contemporary life rather than the mythical past, and there is no reason to assume that chariot racing is an exception. This is particularly true, Roller argues, for funerary scenes, which often include details (such as the presence of children) not found in epic accounts. Contemporary funeral games, rather than those of myth, would seem, therefore, to provide a more likely context for the chariot racing depicted on eighth-century vases. Other types of games appear to have existed at the time, however, and, as Roller (1981b: 115) has noted, funerary games cannot simply be assumed as the context for the chariot racing depicted in vase painting even when chariot racing is shown on funerary vases. Depictions of chariot racing may simply suggest the sporting prowess of the deceased in life, just as scenes of fighting and seafaring suggest the skill of the deceased in those areas.

Figure 3.1 Athenian amphora possibly depicting a chariot race, c.700 BCE. *Source:* British Museum 1936, 1017.1, © Trustees of the British Museum.



The predominance of chariot racing in depictions of sport reveals the existence of individuals rich and powerful enough to be able to maintain a chariot and stable of racehorses and, if the long robes found on many of the vases in question were, as was later the case, associated with professional drivers, able to afford the services of such individuals. In other words, the existence of chariot racing strongly suggests the existence of an established aristocratic class that chose to advertise and maintain its position in society through, among other things, competitive displays of physical prowess and/or material

wealth.

Unlike chariot racing, the other sporting events depicted in eighth-century vase painting tend to appear on smaller vessels of a variety of shapes, though they are also found on the larger vessels used as grave markers. Illustrations of boxing in particular seem to have been popular. A tripod is not infrequently shown between the two participants in a bout (e.g., Waldstein 1902–5: vol. 2, pl. 57, no. 11). This no doubt represents the prize over which they are fighting and suggests a formal, competitive context. Again, the details are impossible to reconstruct with any confidence; funeral games remain a possibility, but other types of games should not be ruled out. Depictions of wrestling and running races also survive but are extremely rare (see, for example, Miller 2004: fig. 29). The comparative rarity of illustrations of sports other than chariot racing, coupled with the fact that they tend to appear on smaller vases, may in itself be significant. One possible explanation is that the participants in these sports tended to be less wealthy. It may have been the case that the wealthiest members of society had the resources to maintain horses for chariot racing and to commission large vases depicting their sporting prowess, whereas less wealthy individuals could afford to compete in sports such as boxing, wrestling, and running, which involved little or no outlay, but were typically unable to afford vases, especially large vases, commemorating their feats.

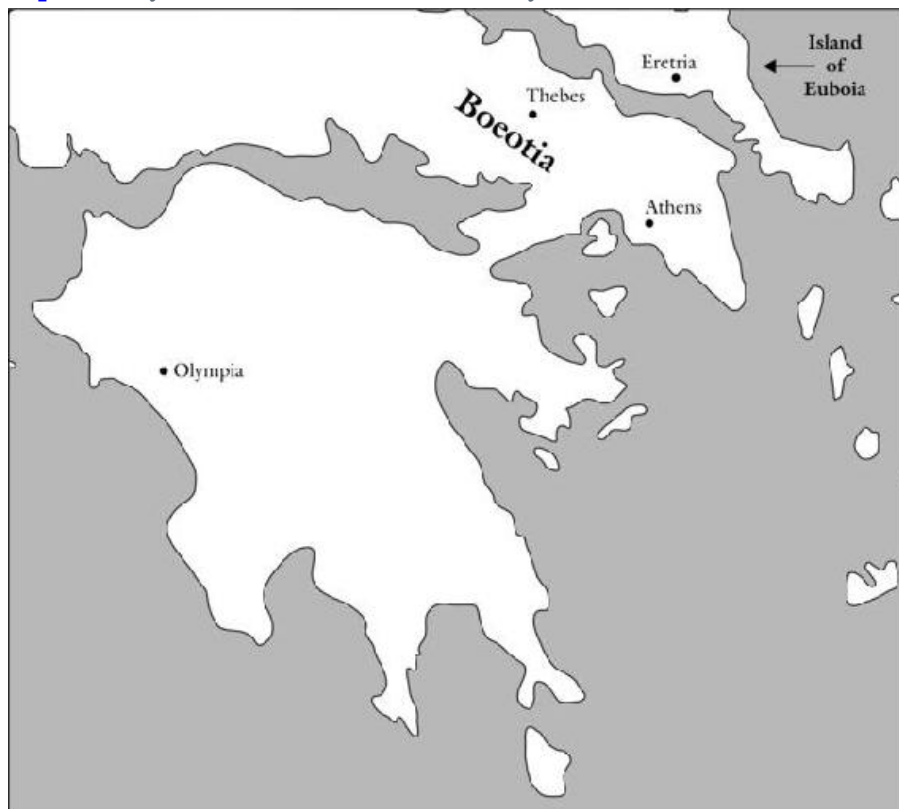
2.2 Boeotian *lebetes*

As we have seen, vase painting only provides limited evidence for the context of sporting activities in the eighth century. Firm evidence for at least one of the contexts in which sport was practiced does exist, however, in the form of prizes that were demonstrably won in games held to honor a dead man. More precisely, there survive a number of fragmentary bronze *lebetes* (cauldrons) of Boeotian origin, inscriptions on which show them to have been awarded as prizes in funeral games.⁴ The remains of some of these prizes have been found in Boeotia itself, but a number have been found in Athens, which suggests that athletes were prepared to travel large distances to compete. The majority of these *lebetes* date to the end of the seventh century (or even later), but one or two date to c.700.

The earliest of these fragmentary *lebetes*, found at Thebes in Boeotia (see [Map 3.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay), bears two inscriptions, which comparison with the later *lebetes* indicates to have been the norm (Jeffery and Johnston 1990: pl. 7, 2).⁵ The first inscription, provided by the host of the games, identifies

the person in whose honor the games were held, and reads: “In honor of Ekpropos.” The second inscription, added by the victor, records the dedication of the prize, and reads: “Isodikos set this up as a votive offering to Pythios [i.e., Apollo].”

Map 3.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



The holding of funeral games, and in particular the offering of prizes, would have required considerable outlay in terms of material wealth. As with chariot racing, then, the fact that certain members of society had the means to host funeral games suggests the existence of an established aristocratic class, and the hosting of such games would, of course, serve to advertise membership in this class. The second inscription on the *lebes* from Thebes shows that victory in the games brought with it considerable prestige, and the victorious athlete had the opportunity to publicize his feat and preserve its memory by inscribing his own name. In the case of this *lebes*, as with later examples, this inscription took the form of a dedication to a god, adding a religious aspect to athletic competition and achievement.

2.3 The Dipylon Oinochoe

A final piece of material evidence that merits attention is the famous Dipylon Oinochoe. This small terracotta jug, which dates from c.740–c.725, takes its name from the Dipylon Gate in Athens near which it was found (see [Map 10.1](#)). It is most notable for the inscription scratched around its shoulder identifying it as a prize awarded for dancing. The inscription, which is in verse, consists of one complete line of dactylic hexameter followed by the beginning of a second line in the same meter. It reads as follows: “Whoever now of all the dancers sports most friskily, to him belongs this . . .” The second hexameter breaks off at this point and is followed by a few further letters in a rather less competent hand.⁶

The fact that the inscription on the oinochoe is metrical – and, more specifically, that the meter is dactylic hexameter – has led scholars to seek connections with the near-contemporary poetry of Homer, which was composed in the same meter. Of most obvious relevance is the banquet scene in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, in which the Phaiakian bard Demodokos displays his skill as a poet by composing and performing a short narrative work (266–369) and by providing the accompaniment for displays of dancing and acrobatics (256–65, 370–80). It has been suggested that “in the Dipylon vase we may have an artifact from a similar social event” (Powell 1991: 162). Such a performance context seems more likely than the funerary contexts in which the Boeotian *lebetes* were awarded, for although eighth-century vase painting provides evidence for dancing in funerary contexts (Ahlberg 1971: 175–84), the awarding of a prize to the dancer who “sports most friskily” seems out of place at a funeral. Moreover, the relatively low value of the terracotta jug and the somewhat improvised feel of its inscription both suggest an informal performance context of the sort found in the *Odyssey*. It is worth noting, however, that there are significant differences between the scene described in the *Odyssey* and the event at which the Dipylon Oinochoe must have been awarded. Most importantly, in the *Odyssey* the Phaiakians dance simply to entertain and impress their guest Odysseus, and no prizes are awarded. Thus the very object – that is, a prize – that is used to link dancing in Homeric epic with dancing in contemporary reality is conspicuously absent from the Homeric account.

3 Sport in Homeric Epic

We come now to the most detailed, but also the most problematic, source of information on sport in Greece in the Early Iron Age: Homeric epic. Scholars have frequently had recourse to Homeric epic as a source for many aspects of historical Greek society around 700 BCE, as is natural given the comparative dearth of other evidence from the period. As has already been noted, however, the nature of the relationship between the society described in Homeric epic and the historical society of Greece is extremely problematic. There are two reasons for this. First, the Homeric poems stand at the end of an oral tradition stretching back several centuries, and while many of the social practices in the poems fit well with what we know of the historical society of eighth-century Greece, it is equally clear that certain details have been preserved from much earlier in the tradition. Moreover, details from different periods are constantly thrown together in the description of both particular objects and of social practices. Second, the Homeric poems are literary texts, and the descriptions of sporting (and other) practices are designed first and foremost to serve the literary aims of the texts, not to provide accurate or consistent depictions of contemporary sport. Homer uses the funeral games of Patroklos, for example, at least in part to explore the theme of reconciliation, though there is no reason for a spirit of reconciliation to be a prominent, or even necessary, feature of historical games.⁷

Given their problematic nature as sources, I will not attempt a reconstruction of contemporary sporting practices on the basis of the evidence provided by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Nevertheless, I will operate on the assumption that the descriptions of sport in these poems reflect the interests and values of the original audience, and while my primary focus will be the discussion of sport in Homeric epic in the epics' own terms, I will try to identify aspects of Homeric sport that may reflect eighth-century realities. Owing to limitations of space, my discussion will focus largely on the description in the *Iliad* of the funeral games for Patroklos (23.257–897) and the description in the *Odyssey* of the games held by the Phaiakians during Odysseus' visit (8.97–417). I will not offer an event-by-event analysis of these games,⁸ but will instead discuss in more general terms the practical aspects of Homeric games (setting, type of events, prizes, competitors, spectators) and the relationship between sport and the Homeric value system.

3.1 Practical considerations

Homeric epic has room for the full spectrum of sporting activities,

from casual pastime to large-scale games. Even important occasions, however, such as the funeral games of Patroklos or the Phaiakians' games, are rather loosely organized, spontaneous affairs. In the case of Patroklos' funeral games, for example, the actual funerary rites have been concluded and the assembled crowd is on the point of dispersing when Achilles suddenly makes them sit and brings prizes from his hut (23.257–61). Historical games, on the other hand, must certainly have been advertised some time in advance, for as we have seen, the Boeotian *lebetes* found in Athens strongly suggest that athletes traveled long distances to compete.⁹ The physical setting of the games described in Homeric epic also shows little in the way of formal preparation. The funeral games of Patroklos are apparently held on the open ground near his tomb, but as they are organized by an army on campaign we would not expect a specially designated space. The chariot race, which naturally requires more room than the other events, seems to be run cross-country, and at one point the course passes through a narrow gulley (23.418–21). The Phaiakian games, by contrast, are held in the town's *agora* (literally "gathering place" 8.109). This may better reflect contemporary realities, though elsewhere in the *Odyssey* Penelope's suitors practice informal athletics on a specially prepared piece of ground (4.625–7, 17.167–9) outside Odysseus' house. We need not conclude from this that Homeric epic knows nothing of more regular games, such as games associated with particular religious sites or festivals. It should be remembered, after all, that the period during which the Homeric epics seem to have achieved their basic forms – the late eighth century – is (traditionally) the period of the earliest Olympic Games,¹⁰ which, whatever their precise origins, were regularly held games with a strong religious component. Indeed, it is possible that Homer presents the games at Elis to which Nestor's father once sent a team of horses (*Iliad* 11.698–700) as "precursors of the classical Olympic games," (Hainsworth 1993: 301) especially as the team in question is made up of four horses, like some eighth-century racing teams depicted in vase paintings, rather than the two horses found elsewhere in Homeric epic in both racing and military contexts.¹¹ Likewise, the very specific mention at *Iliad* 22.159 of a "sacrificial animal" as a prize for running may suggest games, regular or otherwise, with a ritual setting.

Several of the events described in Homeric games have a close connection to military activity. In the funeral games for Patroklos, the chariot race, the fight in armor, the archery contest, and the spear throw all have strong military resonances and make use of military equipment, though this can be partially explained by the military setting of the *Iliad* as a whole. Pride of place is given to the chariot race, for which the competitors apparently drive the same vehicles as

those used to transport them into battle. The Phaiakian games, on the other hand, are striking for their lack of war-based sports, though there is a good literary reason for this: the Phaiakians are characterized in the *Odyssey* as an unwarlike people, and the sports that they play are part of this characterization (Dickie 1983).

Also absent from the Phaiakian games are prizes. This is not the case for games described elsewhere in Homeric epic, however, where prizes play a prominent role. In some respects what we find in Homer accords well with what is known of historical prizes. The first prizes in both the chariot race and the wrestling contest at Patroklos' funeral games, for example, include a tripod,¹² an object commonly used as a prize in historical games and not infrequently depicted in eighth-century art in what appear to be sporting contexts. In other ways, however, the relevant details seem to have been influenced by the thematic concerns of the poems. Many of the other prizes at Patroklos' games – including slaves, livestock, weaponry, and objects made from precious metals – seem to have been chosen simply because they are prestige items. The manner in which such items change hands among Homeric heroes, whether in the form of war booty or as part of the traditional exchange of gifts between host and guest, is a constant concern of epic poetry. Moreover, for each of the events at these games prizes are awarded to most or all of the competitors, and it has been argued that this is designed both to emphasize the generosity of Achilles and to allow the competitors to avoid the shame of defeat (Kyle 2007: 56).

These competitors in Homeric games are drawn, predictably, almost entirely from the ranks of the aristocracy. Achilles assembles the Achaean army as a whole for Patroklos' funeral games, but it is the leaders of the army who actually compete. The competitors in the Phaiakian games are of similarly high status, being described as “noble young men” (8.110). The major exception to this rule is Epeios, who competes, and is victorious, in boxing at Patroklos' games. Epeios does at least have some standing in Greek myth since he is twice identified in the *Odyssey* as the man who built the Trojan Horse (8.492–3, 11.523). As a craftsman, however, Epeios is almost certainly not a member of the aristocracy, and the incongruity of his participation is emphasized by his being made to justify his wish to compete even though he has not distinguished himself in battle (23.670–1), an accomplishment that would be expected of a member of the aristocratic class.¹³ The emphasis in Homeric epic on aristocratic participation in sport probably accords well with the historical realities of Greece through much of the Early Iron Age.

The competitors, of course, only provide half of the human element in Homeric sport, for it is clear that the large-scale games described in

the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* take place in front of a crowd of spectators. This crowd is made up not only of those aristocrats not competing in a particular event, but also the general mass of the people (*Iliad* 23.258; *Odyssey* 8.109–10). To be sure, when the focus shifts from the exploits of the competitors to individual members of the crowd those individuals are invariably important figures, as for example when Idomeneus and the lesser Aias become engaged in a dispute as to who is leading the chariot race (*Iliad* 23.450–98). Nevertheless, the crowd as a whole is not simply relegated to the background, and on at least one occasion their involvement decides the outcome; during the fight in armor at Patroklos' games the spectators are so fearful for Aias – the greater, this time – that they successfully call for the fight to be stopped (23.822–3). It is also worth noting that heroic action in the games, like heroic action in other contexts, attracts the attention, and intervention, of the gods. The outcome of the chariot race at Patroklos' games is the result, at least in part, of divine action by Apollo and Athena (23.382–400), and in the Phaiakian games Athena emerges from the crowd disguised as an old man and marvels at the length of Odysseus' discus throw (8.193–8).

3.2 Sport and Homeric values

The main concern of the Homeric hero, at least while he is alive, is the acquisition of *time*, which is usually translated as “honor” though more literally it refers to the hero's “worth.” This *time* can be acquired by displaying *arete* (excellence) in a variety of contexts, war in particular, but also public speaking and sport. Like “honor” and “worth” in English, *time* can function abstractly, especially when it refers to a hero's worth to his community. Frequently, however, *time* takes physical form. In the *Iliad* it is especially associated with the war booty allotted by the community as a whole to heroes who have displayed *arete* in battle, though material wealth received from any proper source – in the form of a gift from another high-status individual, for example – contributes to *time*. Competition for *time* among the Homeric heroes, even those fighting on the same side, is fierce, and the agonistic nature of Homeric society has often been regarded as its defining feature (Adkins 1960: 30–60).¹⁴ It is easy, however, to overemphasize this aspect of heroic behavior, and it has long been realized that while Homeric heroes may be extremely competitive, the Homeric value system also recognizes the need for more cooperative, harmonious modes of behavior (Long 1970; Allan and Cairns 2011). If *time* is the hero's goal in life, his ultimate wish is for *kleos* (“fame”) after death. In contrast to the rather dreary nature

of the afterlife as described in Homeric epic, *kleos* allows the hero to be a continuing presence among the living, in the sense of being remembered by one's community.

The relationship between this system of values and the practice of sport in Homeric epic – especially in the form of large-scale, public games – is a rather complex one. Like any competitive activity in which there is a victor, Homeric games provide an opportunity to display *arete*, but it is not clear to what extent sporting *arete* translates to *time*, and ultimately *kleos*, in the way that *arete* does in other contexts. As we have seen, the heroes compete in games for prizes that take the form of prestige items. Simply by winning such items the hero increases his *time* in terms of material wealth. It is worth noting, however, that these prizes, unlike war booty, are distributed not by the community but by the individual who is hosting the games. They serve, then, as Kyle (2007: 58) points out, as much as personal gifts as prizes. As such, these prizes seem to have less weight as markers of a hero's *time*, in the more abstract sense of the hero's worth to his community, than the war booty distributed by the community as a whole.

In addition to contributing to a hero's *time*, games can also bring *kleos*. In the case of funeral games, the primary recipient of this fame is probably meant to be the dead hero for whom the games are being celebrated. In the case of the funeral games for Patroklos, this function is somewhat lost in the excitement, and it is Achilles who is the center of attention. Nevertheless, in a scene in the *Odyssey* set in the underworld we find the ghost of Agamemnon congratulating the ghost of Achilles for the fact that the games provided by Achilles' mother, the goddess Thetis, upon Achilles' death have ensured that he will have enduring *kleos* (24.85–94). There is also *kleos* on offer for the competitors in games, since epic poetry is capable – like the inscriptions added to historical prizes by victorious athletes – of preserving the memory of success. As is the case with the *time* won by successful athletes, however, the *kleos* on offer either for a dead man being honored with funeral games or for actual competitors in games seems to be somewhat limited in nature. Ultimately, Achilles is more famous for his exploits on the battlefield than for the magnificence of the games held at his funeral, and it is hard to ignore the fact that, apart from Epeios, all of the competitors in Patroklos' funeral games have already made a name for themselves, usually in battle. Games, it appears, may contribute to a hero's *kleos*, but they cannot form the basis of his *kleos* – no Homeric hero is solely an athlete.

Success in the games, since it has the ability to enhance a hero's *time* and *kleos*, is nevertheless highly sought after. Several of the events in the funeral games for Patroklos reveal the competitive

nature of the Homeric hero, though the poet is also keen to show the proper limits of competition. Perhaps the best example of this is the approach taken to the chariot race by the young hero Antilochos, who has one of the slower teams of horses in the race and is advised by his father Nestor that he will have to make use of cunning if he is to have any chance of success (23.313–14). Taking his father's advice somewhat too far, Antilochos ends up driving so recklessly as to endanger his fellow competitor Menelaos (23.418–37). Given the competitive nature of Homeric society one might expect Antilochos' win-at-all-costs attitude to be tolerated, if not applauded. As it turns out, however, Menelaos successfully challenges Antilochos' claim to second place by demanding that Antilochos swear that he did not win by guile (23.570–85). The issue is prevented from coming to a head by Antilochos' realization that he is in the wrong and his offer to give up the second prize to Menelaos, who then graciously allows the younger man to keep it (23.586–611). Menelaos has made his point, however: success in competitive sport is highly desirable, but only if it is achieved in the right way.¹⁵

The issue of competitiveness also provides a useful example of how the thematic concerns of the poet can affect the presentation of sport. For beyond the general need for restraint, even when *time* and *kleos* are potentially at stake, the poet also has a more particular motive for keeping in check the competitive spirit of his characters in his description of Patroklos' funeral games. As has already been mentioned, these games are used to explore the theme of reconciliation. More precisely, the games are a key step in Achilles' reconciliation with Agamemnon, with whom he has been at loggerheads since the beginning of the poem. The episode involving Antilochos and Menelaos is itself part of the poet's exploration of the theme of reconciliation, but perhaps the most striking example of the subordination of competitiveness and the promotion of a spirit of reconciliation can be found in Achilles' handling of the final event in Patroklos' funeral games, the spear throw. Agamemnon and Meriones both enter this event, but Achilles discourages them from competing and instead declares that the prize shall be awarded to Agamemnon. The games culminate, then, not with a display of competitiveness, but with a final, crowning gesture of reconciliation.

Despite the limits set on competitiveness in Homeric sport, it is nevertheless an activity that is fully integrated into the Homeric system of values. As such, sport is often compared to the quintessential activity of the Homeric, or at least Iliadic, hero: war. More precisely, Homeric sport is treated as an extended metaphor for war (Kyle 1984: 2; 2007: 54).¹⁶ While it is undeniable that there are parallels between these two activities, Homeric sport and Homeric war

are nevertheless very different from each other in certain respects, and it is perhaps more accurate to view them as independent, though related, phenomena. In fact, even when sport is explicitly compared with war, the differences between the two phenomena are at least as important as the similarities. So, for example, in the famous scene in which Achilles chases Hector around the walls of Troy, the poet introduces the images of a running race and a chariot race (*Iliad* 22.158–61):

A good man [Hector] fled in front, but a much better man [Achilles] swiftly pursued him; for the two of them were not striving for a sacrificial animal or for an ox's hide – things that men have as prizes for swiftness of foot – but they were running for the life of Hector, tamer of horses. And as when whole-hoofed, prizewinning horses run lightly round the turning posts, and a great prize lies waiting, either a tripod or a woman, in honor of a man who has died, so the two of them ran three times around the city of Priam on swift feet.

For all the similarities between the two activities, this passage underscores the fact that the stakes are infinitely higher in war than in sport, which perhaps explains the limitations on the *time* and *kleos* that sport can offer.

Thus far our discussion of the relationship between sport and the Homeric system of values has focused almost entirely on the *Iliad*. The relationship between sport and values in the *Odyssey* is in many ways similar, as one would expect given that we find a fundamentally similar value system operating in both poems. Nevertheless, the circumstances under which the Phaiakian games take place do result in a shift in emphasis as regards the significance of participation in sport. As in the *Iliad*, moreover, the particular thematic concerns of the poet of the *Odyssey* also influence the depiction of sport in the poem.

Odysseus is initially reluctant to participate in the games put on for his entertainment. Eventually, however, he is provoked into action when a Phaiakian prince named Euryalos suggests that Odysseus looks more like an (unheroic) merchant than an (heroic) athlete (8.159–64). Odysseus responds to this remark by leaping up and casting a discus heavier than those usually used by the Phaiakians further than the Phaiakian competitors have cast their lighter discuses (8.186–98). In many ways we have here exactly the sort of heroic action that we find in Patroklos' games. By making such an impressive discus throw Odysseus gives ample proof of his *arete*, and while he is not rewarded with a prize per se (since the Phaiakian games do not include prizes), at the end of the games he is given rich gifts and thereby increases his

time (8.387–417).

Nevertheless, there are also important differences between the Phaiakian games and those described elsewhere in Homeric epic, especially Patroklos' funeral games. At the funeral games, the contestants have an opportunity to affirm, and confirm, their heroic identity by displaying their *arete* and winning *time* (and perhaps even *kleos*). In the Phaiakian games, however, the focus is not just on Odysseus' identity as a hero, but also differing attitudes toward violence. As we have seen, the Phaiakians are characterized as a rather unwarlike race, and the absence of war in Phaiakian society naturally leaves sport – along with seafaring, for which the Phaiakians are particularly famed – as a primary means of displaying “heroic” behavior. This is perhaps most obvious in the comments of the Phaiakian Laodamas on the subject of *kleos*. Laodamas, who is trying to persuade Odysseus to participate in the games, remarks that “there is no greater *kleos* for a man . . . than what he achieves with his hands and his feet” (8.147–8). This remark is ambiguous, though Laodamas does not intend it to be. In the context, by “what he achieves with his hands and his feet” Laodamas clearly means sport. Odysseus would no doubt agree with Laodamas' statement, but, like any Greek hero, he would take this to mean success in war first and foremost, with sport coming a distinct second. And yet the Phaiakians, for whom sport is a primary mode of “heroic” behavior, are nevertheless shown to be inferior as athletes to Odysseus, for whom it is a secondary concern. Indeed, the fact that sport is primary for the Phaiakians *explains* their inferiority, since they are never put to the ultimate test in war.

4 Conclusion

Early Iron Age Greece was evidently home to a wide array of sport, from chariot racing to dancing. Unfortunately, the nature of the sources means that our knowledge of sport in Greece in this period, and especially before the eighth century, will always be incomplete. The surviving material culture, which includes visual depictions of sport and even a few prizes, offers tantalizing glimpses of contemporary practices, and Homeric epic allows us to add a few details, though it must be treated with extreme care as a source. The inevitable frustrations entailed by any attempt to build an account of sport in the Early Iron Age on such slender supports is, however, more than compensated for by the richness of the objects and poems in their own right.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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NOTES

- 1 For an overview of the problem, with extensive references, see Crouwel 1992: 56–7.
- 2 It is possible, but rather unlikely, that such scenes showing chariots interspersed with armed men depict a type of race called the *apobates*, which involved armed men leaping down from and up onto moving chariots. Crouwel (2006: 167) suggests that when the chariots and men on foot are clearly shown moving quickly (e.g., Davison 1961: fig. 18) an *apobates* race can perhaps be considered. Much more likely, though, as a candidate for an early illustration of an *apobates* race is an amphora from Eretria (Reber 1999: fig. 2) that shows the second of the two occupants in a series of chariots in the actual process of dismounting (or mounting).
- 3 Chariots also feature elsewhere in the material culture of the eighth century, perhaps most strikingly in the form of a number of figurines found at Olympia that depict charioteers and teams of horses. As Morgan (1990: 90–1) has shown, however, it is impossible to establish a secure connection between these figurines and actual chariot racing, even at a site like Olympia.
- 4 These *lebetes* are, in effect, the top portion (i.e., basin) of a Greek tripod.
- 5 On this *lebes* there is, in fact, the beginning of a third inscription, which may, however, be later in date. For full discussion of these *lebetes*, including issues of dating and the details of the inscriptions, see Roller 1981a: 2–3; Jeffery and Johnston 1990: 91–2; and Powell 1991: 145–6.
- 6 For detailed discussion of this inscription, see Powell 1991: 158–63.
- 7 On the challenges of using the Homeric poems as historical sources, see Morris 1986 and Sherrat 1990.
- 8 Several such analyses exist; see most recently Kyle 2007: 58–70, which also provides analysis of certain other scenes in the *Odyssey* that can be viewed in terms of sport, such as Odysseus' boxing match with Iros (18.1–110).
- 9 Hesiod's brief description of the funeral games of Amphidamas, to

compete in which the poet traveled to Euboea, mentions that the prizes were “announced in advance” (*Works and Days* 655).

10 For the problematic question of the dating of the first Olympics, see Christesen 2007: 18–21.

11 The only other exception is *Iliad* 8.185, where a four-horse chariot is mentioned in a military context. See [Map 8.1](#) showing the locations of Elis and Olympia.

12 A tripod is also mentioned as the prize in the chariot race in which Nestor’s father tries to enter his team (*Iliad* 11.700–1), and Hesiod claims to have won a tripod at the funeral games of Amphidamas (*Works and Days* 657–8).

13 Elsewhere in *Iliad* we find one or two indications that the poet is familiar with a type of competitor who cannot boast the standing even of an Epeios. Nestor, for example, mentions that his father once sent a driver and team of horses to Elis to compete in a race (*Iliad* 11.698–702). While Nestor does not elaborate on the status of this driver, the fact that he remains anonymous strongly suggests that he is meant to be someone of no importance.

14 On the complex question of whether agonism was a defining feature of ancient Greek society in all periods, see the discussion in Ulf 2011.

15 For full discussion of ideas of “fair play” in Homeric epic, see Dickie 1984; for the role of etiquette more generally in the games, see Scott 1997.

16 For more general discussion of the relationship between sport and war in ancient Greece, see Poliakoff 1987: 94–103.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

An excellent and highly accessible introduction to the art and culture of Greece from 1100 to 700 BCE can be found in Hurwit 1985: 33–124. Most book-length studies of Greek art more generally or Geometric art in particular have something to say about depictions of sport in the Early Iron Age, but studies devoted entirely to historical sport in this period are few in number. For discussion of funeral games in art, including Geometric art, see Roller 1981b. Chariot racing, the event that features the most prominently in Greek art of the Early Iron

Age, is discussed in Crouwel 1992 and 2006.

For a general introduction to the Homeric poems, see the articles collected in Fowler 2004 and Morris and Powell 1997. Most histories of Greek or ancient sport include a chapter or section on Homer; for a recent overview, see Kyle 2007: 54–71. Other than Laser 1987, studies that focus solely on Homeric sport tend to be restricted to article- and chapter-length publications in specialized periodicals and edited volumes. These studies naturally tend to focus on the funeral games for Patroklos in the *Iliad* and the Phaiakian games in the *Odyssey*. Various aspects of the funeral games for Patroklos are examined by Willcock 1973 (on the compositional technique of Homeric poetry); Dickie 1984 (on ideas of sportsmanship); Hinckley 1986 (on how the games contribute to the characterization of a particular hero, Aias); Dunkle 1987 (on the different types of heroism on display in the games); Mouratidis 1990 (on details that might reflect Mycenaean athletic practices); Kyle 1996 (on prizes at Homeric funeral games); Hammer 1997 (on the interactions of the spectators at the games for Patroklos as evidence for the emergence of new concepts of political authority); Scott 1997 (who proposes that the description of the games functions as a sort of “handbook of Homeric etiquette”); and Brown 2003 (on athletic contests as forerunners of later judicial processes). The use of the Phaiakian games to characterize the Phaiakians as unwarlike is discussed in detail by Dickie 1983.

CHAPTER 4

Representations of Sport in Greek Literature

Nigel Nicholson

1 Introduction

In 330 BCE Demosthenes found himself defending a decree that he should receive a crown for his service to the people of Athens.¹ In response to the suggestion that his services simply did not match up to those of the great benefactors of the past, Demosthenes compared himself to a boxer at Olympia: “Although he was weaker than Glaukos of Karystos and some other earlier athletes, Philammon did not go from Olympia without a crown; rather, he was crowned and pronounced victor because he fought better than those who came to face him” (Demosthenes 18.319).² Philammon and Glaukos both won the Olympic boxing crown. But, while Philammon, who was probably still alive, had a fine record, the long-dead Glaukos had a *curriculum vitae* outstanding even for Olympic victors. Without this knowledge the comparison is still comprehensible, but Demosthenes clearly assumed that the comparison would serve to illuminate his situation, and this reveals much about the status of sport in Greek culture. Sport offered Demosthenes a common vocabulary that he could use when addressing the jurors. They understood the different meanings of “Philammon” and “Glaukos”; both signified Olympic victors, but the second signified a champion among champions.

Great athletes were household names in ancient Greece – the subjects of legends, anecdotes, and proverbs, as well as of casual references like this one by Demosthenes – and sport provided a ready store of metaphors for conceptualizing events from many different spheres of action. Sport featured in every genre of Greek literature,

whether as the central subject, an incidental reference, or something in between.

Specific athletic victories were celebrated by various literary forms. The genre of epinikian poetry (lyric odes written to commemorate athletic victories) developed around the middle of the sixth century and flourished from roughly 520 to 440 in the hands of authors such as Pindar, Simonides, and Bacchylides (Golden 1998: 77–84; Rawles 2012). Epigrams (short poems inscribed on objects) began to appear on dedications at the sites of games in the early sixth century. By the Classical period (480–323), the elegiac couplet (a poem with one line of dactylic hexameter followed by a line of pentameter) was the norm for these poems, as in this short epigram from about 460, carved in a square around the feet of a statue, on the top side of the base: “A boxer from a glorious land dedicated this, Kyniskos/of Mantinea, victorious, bearing the name of his father” (Ebert 1972: 82–4). Epigrams continued to be used in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (323–31, 31 BCE–476 CE), long after epinikian ceased to be a significant form (Ebert 1972; van Bremen 2007). For his longer poems in praise of athletic victories, Callimachus (c.310–c.240) used elegiac couplets (Fuhrer 1993; Golden 1998: 86–7; van Bremen 2007: 349–54), and he was probably not alone. What look like fragments of an elegiac ode for a boxer from the same period also survive, and by the Hellenistic era victory epigrams had freed themselves from dedications and expanded their range and size, as victory epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology* and the recently discovered Posidippos papyrus demonstrate (Barbantani 2000; PA 9.588; Posidippos 74, 78). (For detailed discussion of the Posidippos epigrams, see Chapter 23 in this volume.) Finally, the various legends that celebrated great victors should be recognized as a distinct form since they display a common repertoire of narrative possibilities (Fontenrose 1968; Currie 2005: 130–3).

But sport reached far beyond pieces intended to commemorate specific athletes. Contests such as the funeral games for Patroklos in *Iliad* 23.257–897 or the fight between Odysseus and the beggar in *Odyssey* 18.40–107 are staple features of epic up to the Late Antique Nonnus, and sport is regularly present in ekphrases and similes (Willis 1941; Fiedler 1992). Stesichorus composed a lengthy lyric poem on the funeral games of Pelias (*PMG* 179), and lyric poetry regularly drew on sport for its imagery. Ibycus, for example, compares the return of desire to the feelings of an aging racehorse facing one more contest (*PMG* 287). Nearly every tragedy made frequent recourse to athletic images (Larmour 1999), and a few, such as Sophocles’ *Electra* or Euripides’ satyr play *Autolykos*, made sport a central theme.

The story with prose is similar. Sport is occasionally central and

almost always present in some form. Herodotus offers frequent athlete biographies (e.g., 5.47 or 6.125–30); Plato's *Lysis* is set inside a wrestling school (203b–4a, 206d–e); athletes appear in Athenaeus's discussions of hospitality, food, and courtesans (3e, 382b, 412d–14d, 573e–4b); and the center of Pausanias's tour of mainland Greece is his description of the dedications made by athletes at Olympia (5.7–6.22). Didactic (hexameter poetry modeled after Hesiod's *Works and Days* and offering explicit instruction in science and crafts) is the least susceptible to the charm of sport, but even here athletes appear in images (Oppian *Halieutica* 2.260–80).

Such dominance of the sources presents a challenge to the kinds of sociological readings of sport that this volume seeks to advance. References to sport may appear to be inert facts of language and literature, without relevance to particular social or political issues and lacking anything but the most general ideological significance. The references are then treated as narrowly literary, referring only within the field of literature and not to the various institutions and discourses of sport. Recurrent metaphors derived from sport are seen as unifying a work or emphasizing its key moments, or descriptions of contests as reworking prior descriptions either to articulate a generic relation or for satirical effect. But such readings restrict the meaning of these references. Certainly, the references function within such a literary arena, but they also operate within a network of sociopolitical discourses.

More recent work, influenced especially by New Historicism, has sought to expose the ideological significance of literary treatments of sport by fitting them into larger social struggles over class, gender, ethnicity, and professional status. The apparently smooth surface of Greek attitudes to sport is broken open to reveal stresses and interests within. Representations of sport are no longer seen as reflections of some stable and preexisting reality, but as efforts to sell a vision to a given audience, to fix as the truth a version of sport that serves some particular interest. These representations are now understood as responses to other representations of sport and as taking place within a complex and not wholly coherent discursive context shaped by a variety of interests competing to control the reality of sport (Rose 1992: 141–84; Nicholson 2005: 15–18, 2007; König 2005: 8–21).

According to this approach, offhand references to sport participate in such ideological struggles as much as works commissioned to celebrate athletic victories. Brief references tap into and sustain a larger network of beliefs about sport and affirm by their simple occurrence that sport is a central cultural symbol. Indeed, as an ideological tool, such casual references as Demosthenes' reference to Glaukos are particularly powerful precisely because all the

assumptions that they involve – in the case of Demosthenes' speech, that sport makes you famous, that an average jurymen should know his athletes, that winning at Olympia is comparable to a significant civic benefaction – are not particularly emphasized, but are treated instead as self-evident facts with which an argument can be built or an observation clarified. Sport was by no means the primary political issue in Demosthenes' speech, but it was still at stake, whether he realized it or not.

The remainder of this essay will attempt to live up to the premises of this new approach in a study of the representation of boxing in epinikian poetry in the first half of the fifth century. It will isolate three fundamental elements in the odes' representation of boxing – beauty, moral excellence, and skill – and show that they were controversial and that they participated in larger debates over the meaning of sport. An event that requires two men to hit each other until one is so incapacitated that he submits or cannot get to his feet might seem, at first sight, an unpromising vehicle for promoting aesthetic and ethical values. But there is no fixed, preexisting reality of boxing to measure the truth of an account against. Rather the event constitutes a symbol or sequence of symbols that literature (and other representational media such as vase painting and the athlete's body itself) can shape into various narratives that oppose each other and compete for primacy. It is this literary competition that new historicist readings of Greek sport seek to trace.

Only three epinikian odes for boxers survive intact: Pindar's *Olympian* 7 for Diagoras of Rhodes, and Pindar's pair of odes for the youth victor Hagesidamos of Western Lokris, *Olympians* 10 and 11. (Bacchylides 1–2 probably celebrate a wrestler; see Schmidt 1999: 78–80.) This should not be understood as evidence that boxing played an insignificant role in the fifth-century imagination. Pindar praised boxers elsewhere, in a lost Isthmian ode (Fragments 2–3) and within an ode for a wrestler that praises the family's success in boxing (*Nemean* 6.15–44); Simonides wrote an ode for the Glaukos referred to by Demosthenes (*PMG* 509) and may have composed a book-worth of odes for boxers (cf. Horace *Art of Poetry* 84; Obbink 2001: 74–7); and boxers were well represented in dedications at Olympia. Moreover, boxers are overrepresented in the athlete legends that circulated as early as the fifth century (Currie 2005: 125–6). These legends, which attributed divine birth, heroic deeds, and mysterious deaths to athletes, were especially attached to athletes who were heroized, and of the 11 athletes known to have been subject of bids for cult status in the fifth century (Currie 2005: 120–2), six were boxers, including Glaukos, Diagoras, Theagenes of Thasos (a pankratiast as well as a boxer) and Kleomedes of Astypalaia.

2 Beauty

The most striking element in epinikian's representation of boxing is the boxer's beauty. The end of *Olympian* 10 is given over to its young victor's form (10.99–105):

I have praised the lovely son of Archemstratos,
Whom I saw conquering by might of hand
At that time
By the Olympian altar,
Beautiful in form
And mixed with the prime of life which once
Kept shameless death from Ganymede, with the help of the
Cyprus-born
[Aphrodite].

Praise of youthful boxers' beauty was not unusual. Boxers were tagged as *kalos* ("beautiful") on Athenian red-figure pottery; a red-figure kylix cup from the early fifth century, now in the British Museum (vase E 39), features a variety of boxing scenes with two separate *kalos* tags. The beauty of youthful boxers continues to be a theme after the Classical period; Dio Chrysostom (*Orations* 28.1–8) describes a boxer who drew the eyes of all, and Apollonius (2.40–4) dilates on the down on Polydeukes' cheeks, comparing him to a "star whose rays are most beautiful as it shines through the evening," as he prepares to box against Amykos.

While the beauty of *Olympian* 10 is that of a youth, in *Olympian* 7, for the adult Diagoras, the idea of beauty is expressed in stature. Diagoras is described as *pelorios* ("huge," l. 15), a word used elsewhere of giants such as Polyphemos and Orion (Homer *Odyssey* 9.187, 11.572). According to Aristotle, who was cited by a later commentary to the ode, Diagoras was "4 cubits and 5 fingers" tall, or about 6 feet 4 inches. Diagoras was surely large, but we should be suspicious of the precise measurement, since the commentary strongly implies that this was the height of Diagoras's famous statue at Olympia. Whether Diagoras was actually 6 feet 4 inches or not, his statue certainly served to suggest that he was a big man, as it was taller than most statues, which averaged perhaps 5 feet 11 inches.

An impressive stature was certainly a recurrent element in the representation of boxers. Epeios, the victorious boxer in the funeral games for Patroklos in the *Iliad*, is described as "a man good and large" (23.664); Panathenaic vases emphasize the size of the boxers, in a way that they do not with wrestlers or pankratiasts; and the first-century CE boxer Nikophon of Miletos is described by Antipater as a

“Milesian giant” with “the neck of a bull” and “the shoulders of Atlas” (PA 6.256). It is probably a mistake to differentiate the beauty of the youth from the stature of the adult – the boxer’s beauty likely lay in the overall impression of his body.

Male beauty was a powerful signifier of class and status in the Late Archaic and Classical periods. Aristocratic males identified themselves as beautiful, not only through the repeated use of *kalos* tags on Athenian pottery, but through a more general homosocial code centered on beauty and elaborated in sport, arts, and literature (Scanlon 2002: 199–273). By marking only aristocrats as beautiful and defining their characteristic spaces (symposium, *palaistrai*, *gymnasias*, Panhellenic sanctuaries)³ as the places where beauty was displayed, this discourse created the idea of a visibly distinct elite.

This was, moreover, an elite with a particular character. Morris (2000: 171–85) distinguishes two aristocratic ideologies in the Archaic period (700–480): an elitist ideology that linked local aristocracies to entities outside their home communities, such as heroes from the past or aristocrats from other Greek or non-Greek cities, and a middling ideology that emphasized the civic community and connections with fellow citizens. Both ideologies had their origins in aristocratic groups, but while the elitist ideology equated excellence with noble birth, the middling ideology was central to the general shift in power away from aristocratic clans toward civic institutions in which a much broader section of the population had a right to participate.

Olympian 10, and epinikian in general, combined elements of both ideologies (Kurke 1991: 163–256), but beauty signified the elitist idea of the aristocracy. This is evident from the comparison of Hagesidamos to Ganymede, a Trojan prince who became immortal. Through this comparison, the victor is linked by the ode to a non-Greek aristocratic hero from the epic past. A similar series of associations can be seen in Herodotus’s account of Philippos of Croton. Philippos, an Olympic victor and the most beautiful man of his day, was exiled after becoming betrothed to a woman from Sybaris (a city at odds with Croton), decamped to Cyrene, joined a colonial expedition to Sicily, and ended up heroized by the non-Greek Segestaians (5.47; cf. Kurke 1993: 151). An emphasis on height, an important component of this idea of beauty, also served to link the athlete into the elitist idea of the aristocracy, since unusual height was the mark of the heroes of the past. When Sparta recovered the bones of Orestes, what indicated that these bones belonged to the hero was, Herodotus claims, the great size of the skeleton (1.68). At 7 feet 6 inches the dead man would have put Diagoras’s statue in the shade.

3 Moral Excellence

Boxing was not, however, just a platform for displaying remarkable physical gifts. As *Olympian* 7 makes clear, boxing was used in epinikian as proof of moral excellence. Diagoras is described as a “straight fighter” (*euthu-machan*, l. 15). This may well refer, on the surface, to his tactics (Golden 1998: 79), but it also carries the deeper, moral meaning – that he fights “straight” or “fairly.” The image returns at the close of the ode when Diagoras is described as “going straight [*euthu-porei*] along a road hostile to arrogance [*hubris*], learning clearly what the upright [*orthai*] minds of his noble patriline have revealed” (*Olympian* 7.90–1). A similar link between excellence at boxing and general excellence of character is seen elsewhere. The boxers in *Nemean* 6 are described simply as “coming to the peak of excellence [*aretas*]” (l. 24), and Hagesidamos as “born in excellence [*aretai*]” (*Olympian* 10.20). Indeed, when Diagoras himself is described as “achieving excellence [*aretan*] in boxing” (*Olympian* 7.89), this should probably be understood to mean that he achieved “excellence through boxing,” rather than “boxing excellence.”

What these odes reveal is a tight intertwining of beauty, athletic success, and excellent moral character. Each of these serves as a sign of the others. To win implies a beautiful body and excellent character, beauty signifies victory and an aversion to arrogance, and excellent character implies an excellent body. This combination of physical and ethical characteristics is, moreover, represented as inherited, so that nobility (high birth) comes to represent an ethical and physical quality also.

Family is a dominant theme in epinikian. In *Olympian* 7, Diagoras’s excellence of character derives from internalizing the precepts of his ancestors, and as the ode closes he and his family are referred to as the “seed of Callianax” and the Eratidai (their clan name). In *Olympian* 10, the victor is referred to at the opening and close as the “son of Archestratos,” and in *Nemean* 6 the whole focus on family victories loudly promotes the idea that excellence is a family quality. This ideology of inherited excellence is a new development in the Late Archaic period, a response to the new idea of a regular nature that underpinned the Presocratic movement. By theorizing that beneath the diverse phenomena of the cosmos lay common processes and common substances, this movement generated the more middling idea that all people shared a common human nature. Elitist aristocratic ideology borrowed the notion of a characteristic nature, but in order to articulate the idea that a limited number of families were innately superior (Rose 1992: 141–84).

The representation of the boxer as beautiful, large, and morally excellent was thus intimately tied up in the political struggles of the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods. These motifs can be seen to fit into larger discourses about aristocratic quality and the cosmos and through that to be active elements in the promotion of an aristocratic order. There is some flexibility in the treatment of these motifs – *Olympian* 10 stresses the victor's beauty much more than *Olympian* 7 – but the ideology that they promote is the same: that excellence is inherited, that there is a separable elite of superior quality, and that physical and moral excellence are two sides of the same coin.

4 Opposition

This vision of boxing was controversial, and it is crucial to study the ways in which it was opposed on the level of its symbols, whether within the same political context or in other political formations. Different values were, for example, accorded to boxers' stature. First, great size was likely represented in democratic works as savage and uncivilized. In Hellenistic descriptions of boxing matches the word used to describe Diagoras, *pelorios*, was reserved for negative exempla. Amykos, an inhospitable and arrogant foreign king who insists on boxing all comers, is described by Apollonius as "like the huge [*pelor*] offspring of destructive Typhos" (2.38–9) and by Theocritus as a man "huge and terrible to look upon, his ears crushed by heavy fists. His huge [*peloria*] chest and broad back was curved with iron flesh, like a hammered-out colossus" (22.44–7).

This close association of size and savagery probably had its roots in the more democratic discourses of Syracusan comedy and Athenian drama; the Syracusan Epicharmus wrote a comedy entitled *Amykos*, while Sophocles wrote a satyr play of the same name (cf. Fiedler 1992: 25). The broad democratic leanings of Athenian drama cannot be denied, but, while Epicharmus may have been active during the Syracusan democracy, he was certainly active under the Deinomenid tyranny that preceded it. His work did, however, anticipate many of the tropes of Athenian comedy, and so became associated with the democracy.

Second, large bodies could also be represented as signs of gluttony and a lack of moderation. The overeating athlete was a popular target of the comedies produced in democratic Athens. A speaker in Euripides' *Autolykos* complains that athletes were "slaves to their jaws and subjects to their bellies," while the title character in the fourth-century Theophilus's *Pankratiast* is said to have eaten "nearly three

pounds of boiled dishes . . . a snout, a haunch, and four pig's feet . . . three ox feet, and a chicken . . . two pounds of figs . . . six pints of unmixed wine" (Athenaeus 413c, 417b; Euripides *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* 441; Larmour 1999: 43–4). Such representations left their mark on Hellenistic literature. Posidippos, who wrote victory epigrams for the Ptolemies and their courtiers, wrote a satirical epigram that pretended to adorn the statue of the boxer and pankratiast Theagenes of Thasos: "And for a bet, I once ate a Maeonian ox; / for my fatherland, Thasos, could not have provided sustenance / for Theagenes. All that I ate, I still asked for more. For this reason / I stand in bronze, holding out my hand" (Posidippos 120; Athenaeus 412e). This gesture (also displayed by Diagoras's statue) was, in fact, a gesture of prayer; Posidippos's epigram thus reread a claim to piety as a sign of gluttony.

Scientific texts saw in such overeating not gluttony, but a poor physical condition, making athletic training the sign of a bad body. A Hippocratic text from the end of the fifth century criticizes a meat diet as causing diarrhea in some athletes and in the fourth century Aristotle criticizes the vast diets of athletes for destroying the good proportion of the body ([Hippocrates] *Nature of Man* 22, *Regimen in Health* 7; Aristotle *On the Generation of Animals* 768b29–35; Visa 1992: 278–80; Golden 1998: 157–8).

The description of the boxer as beautiful might also seem ripe for a challenge. Epic treatments of boxing stress the bloodiness of boxing and the permanent damage it can do to a competitor's face. In the *Iliad*, Euryalos is taken away by his companions "spitting out black blood and dropping his head to one side" (23.697), while Odysseus crushes the bones under Iros's ear, "and crimson blood came out from his mouth at once, and he fell down in the dust screaming" (*Odyssey* 18.97–8). Theocritus describes Amykos as having little left of his ears before he even started to box Polydeukes (22.45). Such brutal results are implied by the athlete legends. Glaukos is said to have been on the point of giving up "under the volume of his wounds," Theagenes of Thasos to have been unable to contest the Olympic *pankration* after having won the boxing competition, and Kleomedes of Astypalaia to have killed his opponent (Pausanias 6.10.2, 6.6.5, 6.9.6). Blood is seen streaming from boxers' noses on Attic pottery (Golden 1998: 58–60).

Yet, while the damage wrought on boxers is clearly depicted, it would be rash to assume that such depictions constitute an attack on the ideology of the beautiful boxer. First, beauty was likely more a question of bodily stature than a fine nose, and, second, the Hellenistic figure of the battered boxer was likely itself an idealized figure representing hard work and knowledge of the world (König 2005: 102–32). Aelian's story (*Historical Miscellany* 10.19) that, en

route to the Olympic crown, Eurydamas of Cyrene lost his teeth, but swallowed them to prevent his opponent knowing, is probably drawn from a hagiographic source, rather than a comic one. Satirical treatments of a boxer's looks only appear for certain in the first century CE with Lucillius, who wrote several such epigrams for Nero: "This Olympicus who now looks like this, Augustus, once had / a nose, a chin, a forehead, ears and eyelids. / Then having enrolled as a boxer, he lost them all" (PA 11.75.1–3; cf. 11.76–8, 81). The second line is a satirical reworking of a famous pentameter attributed to Simonides, but composed later as proof of metrical prowess. Whereas the author of this pentameter managed to pack all five events of the pentathlon into a pentameter, Lucillius fits in all five body parts that Olympicus has lost (Robert 1968: 205–6). Lucillius goes on to describe how Olympicus loses his inheritance because he no longer matches his own portrait.

Although such satire is only attested in the Roman period, there is reason to think that the epinikian account of boxing beauty was formulated with such possibilities in mind. Central to its representation of boxing is the idea that it requires a tremendous outlay but that this outlay makes the joy of victory special. *Olympian* 10 declares that "few have taken joy without toil, a light for life in return for all the work" (ll. 22–3); *Olympian* 7 describes its praise as "compensation (*apoina*) for the boxing" (l. 16), using a term that casts contesting a boxing match as a loss equivalent to a murdered kinsman (Kurke 1991: 108–16). No blood is mentioned, no injuries recorded, but such seem implicit in the notions of toil and compensation; instead of a sign of baseness, blood and scars are made into a sign of special achievement.

A third contested element in epinikian's representation of boxing was the idea that boxing was a sign of moral excellence. Unlike in wrestling, where a victor could win simply with falls, in boxing and *pankration* victory was only gained when an opponent submitted, or could no longer fight, and so a central feature of both events was causing physical harm. It is clear from epinikian that there was a real concern about the lawfulness of those who could do such harm, but such concern is expressed at one remove, with the characters in the myths. Both *Olympians* 7 and 10 recount stories of violent heroes who overstepped proper limits. *Olympian* 7 tells how Tlepolemos fled to Rhodes after killing a relative. *Olympian* 10 recounts Herakles' killing of Euryalos, but, by referring to Herakles as "overmighty," a word used of the suitors in the *Odyssey* (*Olympian* 10.15; *Odyssey* 1.368), suggests that Herakles was not easily distinguished from the immoral Euryalos. The same word is, in fact, used later in such a way that it can refer to either Euryalos or Herakles (*Olympian* 10.29). Both

killings are described in terms that link them to boxing; Euryalos sees his city “sink into a deep trench of folly under harsh fire and iron blows” (*plagais* , *Olympian* 10.36–8; cf. *Nemean* 3.17; *Isthmian* 5.60), while Tlepolemos murders his victim by “striking” (*thenon* , *Olympian* 7.28; cf. Theocritus 22.66) him with a scepter. In both cases, then, there is some admission of a relation between boxing and lawless behavior, but it is muted and kept at a distance from the victors.

Nonepinikian texts explore the possibilities more starkly. The legend of the heroized boxer Kleomedes tells how, after he returned home without his victory, he destroyed a school full of children (Pausanias 6.9.6–8). Through the figure of Herakles, Athenian tragedy (for which *pankration* is a more significant symbol than boxing) represents pankratiasts as antithetical to civil society. In the *Women of Trachis*, Sophocles first depicts Herakles as a pankratiast in his fight with Achelous and then offers a particularly grisly account of his murder of Lichas, while in Euripides’ *Madness of Herakles* Herakles explicitly represents himself as an Isthmian victor as he prepares to kill his family (*Women of Trachis* 517–22, 779–82; *Madness of Herakles* 957–62; Larmour 1999: 96–7, 111–12).

The particular elements of epinikian’s representation of boxing – the boxer’s stature, his scars, the physical force – were thus contested in a variety of sources that interpreted these elements differently and so challenged the larger aristocratic ideology that boxing was framed by epinikian to support. So far, this analysis has considered largely overt elements in this representation, but New Historicist readings must also be alive to the silences, to the covert elements that are part of the representation by virtue of being omitted. Not all silences are significant, but significant silences shape the text because the text responds to them even as it refuses to name them (Rose 1992: 35–7; Nicholson 2005: 25–63). One significant silence in epinikian’s representation of boxing is skill.

5 Skill

Boxing required considerable technical proficiency and lengthy training, a fact recognized in various media. Attic pottery routinely depicts trainers with young boxers, and in Theocritus 22.67 Amykos reminds Polydeukes that he will need his “skill” (*techne*) for their boxing match. The invention of skilled boxing is attributed in the Hellenistic period to Pythagoras of Samos (not the philosopher), who won the Olympics in 588 (Poliakoff 1987a: 80–3; Golden 1998: 113). At Olympia, Glaukos was commemorated by an unusual statue set up

a little after 488 that depicted him in the act of sparring, rather than praying like Diagoras' and Theagenes' statues; this surely emphasized his skill, as it did to Pausanias more than six centuries later (Pausanias 6.10.3).

Yet, in epinikian, boxers are never described as skilled. The idea of skill does, however, surface in the odes. The word for skill, *techne*, appears twice in *Olympian* 7, in both cases with respect to craftsmen. Hephaestus' "skills" release Athena from Zeus's head, and Athena gives the Rhodians "every skill to conquer those on earth with hands excellent at toil" so that they make lifelike statues (ll. 35, 50–1). In this second instance, the connection with boxing is particularly clear since the sculptors' skills enable them to "conquer" their opponents with their "excellently toiling hands." Their skill is the double of Diagoras's skill, and how the former is presented reveals the anxieties that attended the latter. The power of this skill is stressed – it gives the Rhodians the ability to win – but so too is its origin. It is a gift from the gods, a return for the Rhodians' somewhat ham-fisted efforts to "gladden the hearts" of Zeus and Athena (*Olympian* 7.39–43). Behind this vision lies a very different and, for an aristocrat, more troubling idea of skill: that it circulates without restriction as a commodity, ends up in the hands of inferior people, and gives them the power to defeat their superiors – thus undermining athletic victory's claim to be a sign of innate quality. As Pindar asserts in an ode for a pankratiast, "the skill of worse men catches hold of a better man, and makes him fall" (*Isthmian* 4.34–5; Nicholson 2005: 200–10). Such a concern shapes the boxing match in the funeral games of Patroklos. The winner, Epeios, is otherwise known as the craftsman who built the wooden horse, and he apologizes for being an inferior warrior. His superiority in boxing is, however, swiftly evident, but the prize, a mule, is perhaps one further sign of his skill's problematic status (*Iliad* 23.676–99; Golden 1998: 89; Kyle 2007: 61–2).

The anxiety about skill springs, therefore, from the idea that it might be teachable, and so might be an excellence that is not inherited. This anxiety belongs with the larger aristocratic anxiety concerning the Sophistic movement of the fifth century, and indeed commodity exchange generally. The Sophists traveled from city to city, offering instruction for a fee, especially in rhetoric, and were seen as threatening the elite's hold on the organs of power (Rose 1992: 273–8; 338–41; cf. Golden 1998: 146–57; Hawhee 2004: 86–108).

Athletic trainers might look a lot like Sophists, selling easily transferred skills to whoever could pay, and so it is not surprising that anxieties about skill surface with the trainer in *Olympian* 10 (ll. 16–21):

A boxer victorious in the Olympic Games,
let Hagesidamos give thanks
to Ilas, as
Patroklos to Achilles.
Whetting one who is born in excellence, a man may
with a god's help, stir him to huge [*pelorion*] glory.

Pindar offers here a suspiciously ideal relationship between trainer and athlete. Like an epic companion, the trainer is a model, not an instructor. The training is not a commodity available to all for a fee, but part of an enduring homosocial relationship marked by reciprocal service and appreciation. Finally, the trainer does not create the excellence of the athlete; the athlete is “born in excellence,” and the trainer merely “stirs” him to glory. This ideal not only offers a vision of training compatible with the aristocratic ideology of excellence, but also by its very specificity marks out the idea that skill was inserted into athletes by itinerant professionals, an idea it was seeking to drive from people’s consciousness (Nicholson 2005: 135–66).

6 Conclusion

This examination of how boxing was represented in epinikian has explored how the representation was thoroughly ideological, supporting aristocratic ideals of class and excellence, but also how it was contested. This contest was above all concerned with fixing the meaning of individual elements of the representation, such as stature, scarring, and skill. Some competing readings of these elements can be found in other sources, but some must be reconstructed from the way boxing is represented in the odes themselves.

Until the 1990s, studies of literature that contained representations of sport largely ignored the politics of those representations, preferring to focus on their poetic role within the larger work. This is now changing, but, given how abundant references to sport are in Greek literature, there is much exciting work to be done. In particular, recent scholarship has tended to focus on pieces of literature, such as epinikian, where sport is a dominant theme, leaving much to be done on incidental references. When a fragment of Anacreon compares love to a boxing match with Eros (“Bring us water, bring us wine, boy, and bring us crowns of flowers; bring them, so I may box with Eros,” *PMG* 396), this not only provides a striking image, but also supports the centrality of boxing to aristocratic life, and perhaps interrogates both the aristocratic ideal of Eros and the aristocratic image of the boxer.

ABBREVIATIONS

PA = *Palatine Anthology*

PMG = D. L. Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci*

NOTES

¹ All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

² All translations are my own.

³ On *palaistrai* and *gymnasia*, see Chapter 19 in this volume.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Much scholarship considers scenes of sport in Greek literature, but rather less does so in a similar way to that advanced here. An excellent starting point, both for its clear articulation of its premises and its specific insights, is König 2005. Golden 1998 and 2008 offer numerous insights on a variety of works, always keeping the social context in view. On the various sport scenes in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, see Rose 1992: 92–140 and Kyle 2007: 54–71. Larmour 1999 not only shows that drama is thoroughly imbued with sports imagery, but also examines its general ideological implications; Arnott 1981 does so for Euripides' *Electra* specifically. Rose 1992: 141–84 and Kurke 1991 articulate the central political issues in epinikian's use of sport in general; Nicholson 2005 interrogates the specific representation of charioteers and trainers. Hawhee 2004 examines the way that rhetoric places itself relative to sport. For Callimachus, Theocritus, and Hellenistic epigram, more needs to be done on the politics of the representations of sport, but the new Posidippos is offering some points of entry (Barbantani 2000: 71–2; Fantuzzi 2005; van Bremen 2007; Golden 2008: 16–23; and Remijsen 2009). König 2005 offers a wide-ranging study of Roman imperial prose, including Lucian, Dio Chrysostom, Pausanias, Galen, and Philostratus. On Pausanias, see also Newby 2005: 202–28, and on Dio Chrysostom,

Poliakoff 1987b. The satirical poetry of Lucilius is an underappreciated source; Robert 1968 and Nisbet 2003: 36–81 lay a fine foundation for further study of its social implications.

CHAPTER 5

Picturing Victory

Representations of Sport in Greek Art

Jenifer Neils

1 Introduction

“The important thing at the Olympic Games is not to win, but to take part, just as the important thing about life is not to conquer but to struggle well.”¹ In 1936 these words of Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, were broadcast from Switzerland to the audiences seated in the Olympic stadium in Berlin and around their radios throughout the world. His message, however, would not have resonated with the ancient Greeks, for whom winning and conquering were the be-all and end-all. Just as the Spartan soldier was expected to return home either carrying his shield (i.e., as a victor) or on it (i.e., dead) (Plutarch *Moralia* 241f), so the Greek athlete either won his event or slinked off in shame and defeat. There were no statues erected to second-place finishers, no victory odes for those who placed third, and no honors back in the home *polis* for those who simply took part.²

This winner-take-all mentality is well expressed visually on a vase commissioned for a tribal victory in the torch race possibly held at the Panathenaic Games in Athens (Figure 5.1, BAPD 217462; Kaltsas 2004: no. 125). (For more on the Panathenaic Games, see Chapter 10 in this volume.) Here Nike is alighting and about to tie a fillet on the akimbo arm of the winning torch racer, who stands before an altar. The winner is nude except for a special spiked crown worn by such runners. The crown’s band bears the name of his tribe, Antiochis, one of the ten tribal divisions of the population of ancient Athens devised

by the democratic reformer Kleisthenes (Thorley 2004: 19–26). Beyond the flaming altar a draped elderly man throws back his head and with open mouth publicly proclaims the name, presumably, of the winning tribe. At the far left one of the losers hastens away, his head downcast. As on many Athenian vases the proud winner is the focus of attention, standing at the altar, acclaimed by the judge and the personification of victory herself; what makes this vase unique is the recording of the actual winning team in this tribal contest (Neils 1994). It is not a generic victory but one earned in a specific contest by a recognizable team in Classical Athens.

Figure 5.1 Athenian krater showing torch race victor, attributed to the Nikias Painter, c.420 BCE. *Source:* British Museum 1898, 0716.6, © Trustees of the British Museum.



Even more unusual is the incised signature on the underside of this vase, that of the potter Nikias. He also gives his patronymic (father's name) as well as his deme (town), Anaphlystos, the residents of which belonged to the tribe of Antiochis. Thus, this vase represents a modest victory memento, no doubt commissioned by a member of the winning tribe, and unlike the majority of Athenian vases, which have been excavated from graves in Italy (Spivey 1991; Sparkes 1996: 34–63), this one was buried in Greece, most probably in the grave of a member of the tribe Antiochis.

Athletic competitions among members of the 10 Athenian tribes were devised as a means of promoting group solidarity and civic

identification in the budding democracy. Athenian tribes advertised their prestigious hippic (horse and chariot) victories in the Panathenaic Games in a permanent and prominent way, namely by erecting commemorative marble reliefs along the Panathenaic Way in the *agora*, the center of ancient Athens (see Map 10.1). A fragmentary relief from the fourth century (Agora Museum I 7167, Kaltsas 2004: no. 138), for example, shows horsemen performing a mock battle known as the *anthippasia* on one side and a lion on the other; the lion is a canting device referring to the winning tribe Leontis.³ Another dedication celebrating a Panathenaic victory, erected on the Athenian Acropolis by an individual named Atarbos, shows a group of men performing a pyrrhic dance (Acropolis Museum 1338; Makres 2009). All of these monuments demonstrate the extent to which sport and contests were not only embedded into the political and social life of democratic Athens, but were also an essential component of its success. (For more on the relationship between sport and democracy in Athens, see Chapter 13.)

Although male athletes and equestrians are ubiquitous in the arts of ancient Greece, the material remains from Athens tend to dominate in most studies devoted to this topic. Extant vases that feature representations of human figures and that were manufactured in Athens far outnumber those from other cities, and the vase paintings utilized to illustrate modern books on the ancient Olympics are mostly Athenian in origin. Many of those showing athletes in competition were made for the local Athenian festival, the Panathenaic Games, as we shall discuss. While Pausanias, who visited Olympia in the second century CE and wrote a guidebook to the site, mentions some two hundred victor statues, not one is extant (Herrmann 1988). Other sites have produced a mere smattering of what once crowded their sanctuaries; the famous bronze charioteer of Delphi is a chance survivor from the lavish victory monument of a Sicilian tyrant in the early fifth century, consisting of a chariot with four life-size horses (see Chapter 12). Often all that remains are the bases with inscriptions naming the victor and cuttings to indicate the type of statue, bronze or marble, that once stood atop the stone.

Athenian ceramic art provides an extensive body of information about athletics that can be applied with caution to other city-states and sanctuaries. Beginning in the Geometric period (900–700) and continuing to the end of the Classical period (480–323), male athletes were regularly depicted on Athenian vases. They are shown training at the *gymnasion*, in the heat of competition, and in the moment of victory with their crowns and fillets. They are shown in all age categories: beardless boys, semi-hirsute youths, and bearded men. Often their physiques reflect their particular sport: lithe, long-legged

runners; brawny wrestlers; bleeding boxers; diminutive jockeys. With the exception of charioteers who wore long robes (chitons), they are regularly depicted nude⁴ with their attributes indicating their event: javelin, discus, and jumping weights (*halteres*) for pentathletes; leather straps (*himantes*) for boxers; helmets and shields for participants in the race in armor (*hoplitodromos*); spiked crowns for the torch racers. Winners decked out in body fillets, holding foliage or palm fronds, or wearing special pointed helmets are not uncommon in Athenian vase painting (Kephaliadou 1996), but losers, like that on the Nikias vase, are rarely portrayed. Women and girls, who did take part in competitive sport, are even rarer. (For more specifics on all of these events, see Chapter 1, and, for more on female athletes, see Chapter 16.)

Although athletes and their contests were always popular in Greek art, their portrayals changed over time. In the art of the Geometric period, there are already scenes of sport, but because of the schematic nature of this art it is often difficult to determine the exact nature of the event. Images of men stepping on or off chariots, for instance, could be warriors departing for a funerary procession (Rombos 1988: 116–23) or portrayals of the *apobates* race, in which warriors mounted and dismounted from moving chariots (as argued by Reber 1999). When a tripod is present the figures in wrestling and boxing poses could be seen as contestants, but whether they pertain to mythological events (e.g., the funerary games for Patroklos in Homer's *Iliad*) or are genre scenes is open to question (Rombos 1988: 209–14). (For more on sport and representations of sport in art and literature in the Geometric period, see Chapter 3.) In Athenian vase painting, sport represents the largest single type of genre scene between 600–480, but virtually disappears after 450, when vase painters developed a preference for depicting nude youths simply holding strigils (bronze scrapers used to clean up after exercise, Kotera-Feyer 1998). While runners are fairly popular on Athenian black-figure vases (most of which date to the sixth century), they are almost nonexistent in later red-figure; participants in the race in armor seem to take their place on early red-figure vases, and torch racers on later ones. (For late fifth- and early fourth-century illustrations of the torch race in Corinthian red-figure, see Herbert 1986.) In the Early Classical period (480–450) statues of active athletes, like Myron's *Diskobolos*, come into their own, no doubt because of technical advances in the casting of bronze that enabled sculptors to achieve more daring poses that would have been impossible in stone without the use of struts. By the fourth century these athletes usually stand quietly, equipped with a strigil (e.g., Lysippos's *Apoxyomenos*, Miller 2004: fig. 17) or touching their victory crowns (e.g., the Bronze Victor now at the J. Paul Getty

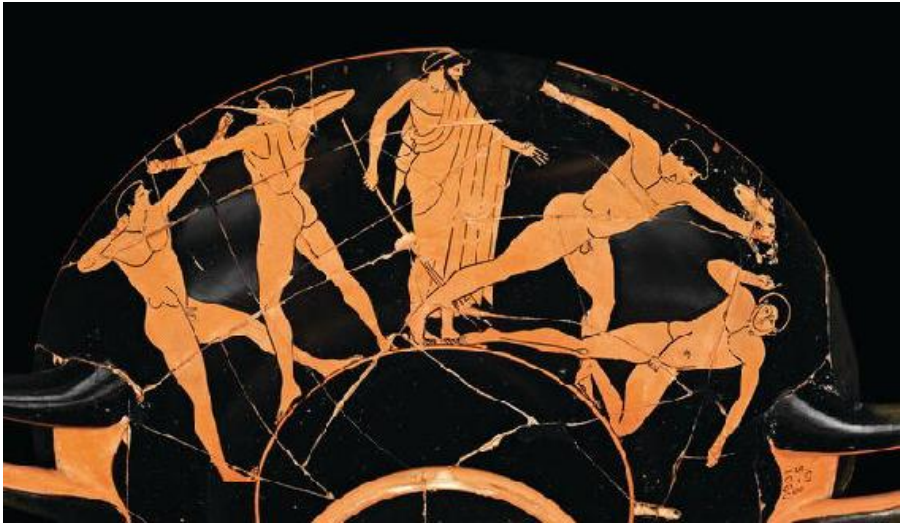
Museum (77.AB.30; Valavanis 2004: fig. 542; see also Mattusch 1997)). The Hellenistic period (323–31) sees the most realistic portrayals of athletes with scarred bodies, broken noses, and cauliflower ears (e.g., the Terme Boxer, Miller 2004: figs. 86–7).

Rather than taking a chronological approach, this essay will examine the various phases through which the athlete went on his path to victory, beginning with his training in the *palaistra* (wrestling school) and *gymnasion*, progressing to the competitions in which he performed, and ending (hopefully) with a win and the dedication of his victory monument. Greek artists, especially Athenian vase painters of the Late Archaic period (c.520–480), documented all these phases of athletic activity, and the custom of erecting life-size statues of winning athletes in bronze and marble represented lucrative contracts for Greek sculptors in all periods (Rausa 1994). While Athenian vases have survived in large numbers, most marble and nearly all bronze sculpture was recycled long ago, and so scholars must rely on Roman copies and later textual evidence (particularly Pliny and Pausanias) for mention of famous but now lost monuments to athletes and equestrians.

2 Training

A typical scene in the Greek *palaistra* can be found on an Athenian red-figure cup signed by Douris, one of the preeminent vase painters of the Late Archaic period. On the outside (Figure 5.2, BAPD 205073) are pairs of young nude boxers sparring. Between them is a draped, bearded man holding a forked stick, who can be identified as a trainer. The bout on the right is about to end, as indicated by the raised index finger of the fallen youth, a signal of his defeat. In a convention common to Greek art, the victor in a bout is almost always placed at the left, moving to the right or lucky side. The loser's frontal face, rare in Greek art, is also a sign of his discomfiture. What distinguishes this vase from other typical *palaistra* scenes is the image on the interior, where another young boxer, holding his *himantes* or thongs, bends toward an altar, thus establishing the religious context of these athletic scenes. He may either be praying for victory or offering thanks for a recent win, and he serves to remind the viewer that sport was not simply entertainment and aesthetically beautiful bodies, but exertion performed in honor of gods and heroes.

Figure 5.2 Athenian cup showing boxers and trainer, attributed to Douris, c.480BCE. Source: British Museum 1867, 0508.1060, ©



Youthful athletes are the stock in trade of Athenian red-figure cup painters and represent the most common genre theme in Athenian vase painting in the Late Archaic period. One obvious way of determining that they are in the *palaistra* as opposed to the stadium is by the presence of their grooming paraphernalia, which is often suspended in the background: strigil, sponge, and aryballos (round jar) containing oil. This preoccupation with the body relates to the Greek *palaistra* as a place of assignation for older men courting younger boys, whose fit physiques were there displayed in the nude (Scanlon 2002: 87–93, see also Chapter 15). Thus, the interior of a wine cup (like that of [Figure 5.3](#), Neils 1992: no. 27) may well portray a young athlete in a pose that accentuates his fit body in general and his genitalia in particular.

Pentathletes, one of the most favored subjects of Athenian vase painters, are distinguished by their equipment and so are normally shown either throwing the javelin, hurling a discus, or jumping with their *halteres*. Athletes depicted on Athenian red-figure vases are always young in contrast with representations on earlier, black-figure vases, where they are often bearded. This “youthening” is not uncommon in Greek art in general and vase painting in particular. Common to these scenes are the subsidiary figures of trainer or flute player, whose draped bodies contrast intentionally with the nudity of the athletes.

Another type of training scene, which became popular starting in the fifth century, showed athletes posing with their strigils. A chous (wine jug) by the Achilles Painter, now in Basel, ([Figure 5.4](#), BAPD 275428) depicts two athletes and a smaller boy (who may be a slave

as he is holding an aryballos, often depicted in the hands of young servants on grave markers). While the athlete on the right is scraping his arm with his strigil, his counterpart on the left is cleaning the hollow of his strigil, using his right thumb to remove the accumulated oil and sweat known as *gloios*. (This substance was actually collected in bathing establishments and sold for medicinal purposes; see Kennell 2001.) The inscription between the two athletes reads, “Euaion kalos Aischylo” (“Euaion the son of Aeschylus is lovely”) and almost certainly refers to Euaion, the son of the famous tragedian (Webster 1972: 47–8). (For more on *kalos* inscriptions on vases, see Chapter 15.) Because the Achilles Painter rarely painted athletic scenes and used this particular *kalos* name only once, one wonders if this vase was not a special commission for or on behalf of Euaion. If so it demonstrates the importance of athletic training not just for athletes but for the intelligentsia of the city as well.

Figure 5.3 Athenian cup showing boxer/pentathlete, attributed to the Epidromos Painter, c.500 BCE. *Source:* Hood Museum of Art C.970.35, Dartmouth College, gift of Mr and Mrs Ray Winfield Smith, Class of 1918.



Figure 5.4 Athenian chous (wine jug) showing two athletes with a younger slave, attributed to the Achilles Painter, c.440 BCE. *Source:* Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig BS 485.



The motif of athletes using their strigils also appears in relief on a marble statue base found on the northwest slope of the Acropolis and dated to c.320/10 (Acropolis Museum 3176, 5460, 2635; Kaltsas 2004: 38 fig. 2). On the front are preserved six athletes in the process of scraping different parts of their muscular bodies with their strigils, thereby enabling the sculptor to show them in a variety of poses. They are contemporary Athenians as their names inscribed below indicate, and the four names that are preserved belong to the same tribe, Oineus. Thus, it is probably a dedication on the Acropolis of a winning tribe, but the event is unclear. However, the fact that a tribe would dedicate an expensive marble monument on the Acropolis indicates the importance of this place as a locus for commemoration, and apparently the depiction of the contest per se was not as important as displaying the handsome, athletic bodies of one's tribesmen.

How does one account for the ubiquity of training scenes in Athenian art? There were many athletic facilities in Athens, which enabled a large part of the male population to spend time at *gymnasia* and *palaistrai* (see Chapters 10, 13, and 19). Most men made their living from their land, and the absence of rainfall in the summer months meant that even those of modest means had a considerable amount of leisure time for at least part of each year.⁵ As members of the army and cavalry from the age of 18, men were expected to keep

in good physical condition. And as we have already said, the homoerotic attractions of *gymnasia* and *palaistrai* made them popular arenas for male courtship. Physical training was an essential part of every youth's upbringing, based on the belief that an ideal body complemented the moral perfection of an individual. The training and strigiling scenes by and large appear on cups and kraters, which were used by men at their drinking parties (venues as well for male courting), and so the ceramics industry naturally promulgated this athletic imagery with its direct appeal to the adult male consumer.

3 Competition

Because "athlete" by definition means "one who competes for a prize," it is hardly surprising to find prizes prominently featured in athletic imagery. The first representations in Athenian art of identifiable athletic contests appear in the early sixth century, coincidentally around the time of the reorganization of the Panathenaic festival in Athens (typically dated to 566). Myths that include elaborate funeral games held in honor of dead heroes were illustrated, complete with spectators and prizes, on large black-figure vessels. On a sadly fragmentary dinos (wine-mixing bowl) painted by Sophilos (Athens National Museum 15499; Tzachou-Alexandri 1989: no. 25) we see a chariot race in full swing. This fragment is especially unusual because it depicts the grandstand or *ikria* that was erected for the spectators, and bears one of the few pictorial titles found on a vase ("Patroklos alta," "the games of Patroklos," with both words misspelled; on the games for Patroklos, see Chapter 3). This chariot race reappears on the famous François Vase signed by Kleitias and Ergotimos and made c.570; under the horses are set out the bronze vessels that served as prizes (Florence, Museo archeologico 4209; BAPD 300000). The funeral games for the mythical Thessalian hero Pelias are shown on a dinos from the Acropolis, with a prize tripod prominently featured (Athens National Museum 15147, 15466; Tzachou-Alexandri 1989: no. 26). In the early fifth century the mythical chariot race of Pelops with King Oinomaos of Pisa filled the large pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, and the prize is none other than Hippodameia, daughter of the king.

Thus it is not surprising that in the earlier depictions of nonmythological competitions it is the prominent placement of lucrative prizes – bronze tripods and bowls – that allows us to identify them as contests rather than training. Vases painted in many different places in Greece (including Argos, Athens, Boeotia, Corinth, and

Laconia) depict tripods in conjunction with horse and chariot races, boxing and wrestling contests, and footraces (Sakowski 1997).

By far the most numerous depictions of contests appear on the two-foot tall black-figure amphorae filled with olive oil that were awarded as prizes at the Panathenaic festival in Athens (see [Figure 5.5a–b](#)).⁶ The series began c.566 and endured until the fourth century CE, thus representing the longest lasting class of athletic depictions in Greek art. These vases are distinctive in a number of ways: the shape is a narrow necked amphora with a tapering foot, they bear a prominent inscription announcing that they constitute the prizes of Athens (*ton Athenethen athlon*), they remain in the black-figure technique long after red-figure replaced it as the medium of choice among vase painters, and the Athena on the obverse continues to be depicted in an Archaic style well beyond the Archaic period. These features taken together made the prize vases, typically called Panathenaic amphorae by modern scholars, immediately recognizable throughout the Mediterranean, and they eventually became emblematic of the festival itself (Valavanis 2001; Neils 2001).

Before the canonical form was developed around 530, Panathenaic amphorae sometimes identified the contest for which they were presumably the prize. An example from c.560, now in New York, labels the footrace of three bearded runners on the reverse as the *andron stadion*, the sprint for men, but another prize vase with a similar inscription includes a beardless runner so vase painters were not always consistent (Moore 1999, figs. 8 (New York 1978.11.13) and 14 (Halle 560)). Nor could they for the most part succeed in depicting the natural running gait with forward arm opposite forward leg; it took a master like the Berlin Painter to recognize and execute in paint the correct diagonal position (Neils 1992: no. 24). However, vase painters were aware of the different positioning of the arms for a sprint (flung out) versus a long-distance race (close to the body).

Because so many Panathenaic amphorae survive, we can detect certain artistic conventions in the depictions of contests. Runners, for instance, always race to the right, but runners in the *hoplitodromos* move to the left, thus enabling the viewer to see the devices on their shields, which were carried on the left arm. Chariots, usually shown solo because of the limited available pictorial space, gallop to the right as do horses with jockeys, but participants in the *apobates* race move to the left, again so the exterior of the dismounters' shields are visible (Bentz 1998: no. 4.079). Bouts of wrestlers, boxers, and pankratiasts are accompanied by one or two referees, or by the next contestant who will take on the winner. Pentathletes are shown with their equipment (discus, javelin, and jumping weights) in order to identify their event. Occasionally there are elements of setting, for

example, the turnpost for the runners, jockeys, and charioteers, or the starting gate (*hysplex*, Bentz 1998: 4.073) in the stadium (see Chapter 18). In rare instances the referees are holding equipment pertinent to the contest, such as a horizontal rod for measuring the distance between boxers (Bentz 1998: no. 5.029) or pairs of lettered sticks for drawing bouts (Bentz 1998: no. 5.091).

Figure 5.5a–b Panathenaic prize amphora showing Athena and wrestling contest, attributed to the Berlin Painter, c.480 BCE. *Source:* Hood Museum of Art C.959.53, Dartmouth College, gift of Mr and Mrs Ray Winfield Smith, Class of 1918.

(a)



(b)



Contests are represented in a variety of media besides terracotta vases. A bronze discus now in Berlin, for instance, is engraved with images of pentathletes (Berlin FR 1273; Tzachou-Alexandri 1989: no. 157), and Greek coins were an especially popular vehicle for athletic imagery. Silver *tridrachmai* minted in Kos c.480–c.450 depict a discus thrower in a complex pose, bending back with the discus overhead, and the tripod next to him was no doubt the prize (Kaltsas 2004: no. 131). A fifth-century electrum *stater* from Kyzikos portrays a nude man in helmet and greaves and holding a shield, clearly an athlete preparing to begin a *hoplitodromos* (Herrmann and Kondoleon 2004: no. 31). Silver *stateres* minted in Aspendos in the fourth century show a pair of wrestlers about to begin their bout on one side, and a man with a slingshot on the other (Figure 5.6a–b, Neils 1992: no. 37). The fifth-century coins of Larissa prove that bullfighting was practiced in this city; on the obverse a bull is being wrestled to the ground, while the bullfighter's horse gallops away on the reverse (Kaltsas 2004: no.

137). Most famous is the silver coinage of various Greek communities in Sicily that features a winning four-horse chariot, stationary in the fifth century, but in full gallop in the early fourth (Kaltsas 2004: nos. 73–6). A winged Nike (victory) often hovers overhead, crown in hand, signaling an equestrian victory. With the advent of Nike, we now turn from the contestants to the victors.

Figure 5.6a–b Silver *stater* minted by the city of Aspendos showing wrestlers and youth aiming slingshot, c.350 BCE. *Source:* Hood Museum of Art 990.24.27095, Dartmouth College, Gift of the Class of 1962.

(a)



(b)



4 Victory

Given the Greek emphasis on winning it is perhaps surprising that the actual moment of victory, as when a runner crosses the finish line or a boxing match ends, is not often depicted in Greek art. The one important exception is chariot racing, which was one of the most prestigious of sporting events. In both relief sculpture and vase painting, charioteers are shown as victors when a judge or figure of Nike swoops down to offer them a victory token. In the *apobates* race shown on the north frieze of the Parthenon, for instance, the charioteer is reining in his team just as the warrior has leapt to the ground, turning back to look at his competition, and placing his foot on a prominent rock. This rock could well represent the Eleusineion (a sanctuary located near the Acropolis that featured a prominent rocky outcrop and that was the place where the race ended), and the draped male extending his right hand may be offering a victory crown (Neils and Schultz 2012). On later fifth-century Athenian red-figure vases chariots are regularly shown in full gallop with a Nike fluttering nearby, victory token in hand (Kephaliidou 1996). In the case of the equestrian races this emphasis on the winning moment is somewhat ironic as the real victor was the owner of the horses, not the jockey or charioteer (for more on horse racing, see Chapter 1).

Figure 5.7 Drawing of an athletic victor holding branches and fillets, from an Athenian amphora attributed to Douris, c.480 BCE. *Source:* St Petersburg Hermitage Museum B.5576, from *Compte Rendu de la Commission Impériale Archéologique* 1874, pl. 7.



In place of the climactic moment in the contest itself, Greek artists preferred to depict the relaxed, victorious athlete. Victors are identifiable on vases by tokens of triumph that can include a wreath or spiked helmet on the head, long fillets tied on the limbs, and branches (or later a palm frond) in hand (see [Figure 5.7](#)). Often an older judge stands nearby, his head thrown back, as he announces the name of the victor (cf. [Figure 5.1](#)). One striking aspect of these victors in Athenian vase painting is their youth; one never encounters a bearded man bedecked in ribbons or holding bunches of leaves. It has been suggested that these beautiful boys might be winners in the Panathenaic contest known as the *euandria* or “manly excellence” (Neils 1994).

As for statues of victors, Pliny the Elder records the following: “It

was not customary to make effigies of men unless, through some illustrious cause, they were worthy of having their memory perpetuated; the first example was a victory in the sacred contests, especially at Olympia, where it was the custom to dedicate statues of all who had been victorious” (*Natural History* 34.16, trans. J. Pollitt). According to Pausanias (6.18.7) the boxer Praxidamas of Aigina was the first athlete to have a statue made in his honor, after his victory in the 59th Olympiad (544). ⁷ It was made of cypress wood, and given its date in the Archaic period, must have looked very much like a *kouros* (a sculptured representation of a nude young man), standing stiffly with its arms at its sides. At Olympia, Pausanias (6.1–18) lists 197 victor statues, in addition to which there are approximately 60 extant statue bases at the site not mentioned by the author (Herrmann 1988). In spite of the hundreds of victor statues that stood at Olympia at least until the time of Pausanias, there are few Roman copies that can be associated with the bases at Olympia. An exception may be the so-called Westmacott Athlete in the British Museum ([Figure 5.8](#)), whose stance matches that preserved on the statue base of a young boxer named Kyniskos. This statue is attributed to Polykeitos of Argos, the preeminent Classical sculptor of athletes, whose canon of bodily proportions influenced generations of Classical sculptors (Stewart 1990: 1: 160–3).

Figure 5.8 The Westmacott Athlete, Roman copy of Greek original by Polykleitos of Argos from c.440 BCE. *Source:* British Museum 1857,0807.1, © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 5.9 Bronze head of a boxer found at Olympia, c.330–320 BCE, Athens National Museum Bronze 6439. *Source:* Photograph by Sharon Mollerus. Used with permission.



Most statues of athletes were executed in bronze, a medium that allowed for more naturalistic, lively poses, but because of the intrinsic value of the metal, few survive. However, a bronze life-size head of a victorious boxer was uncovered in Olympia in 1880 (Figure 5.9). All that remains of his victor's olive wreath are the twisted stems and two leaves at the back of his head. He has been identified as Satyros of Elis, who won the boxing contest at Olympia in 332 and 328 and was portrayed by the Athenian sculptor Silanion. But he could also be the pankratiast Sostratos of Sicyon, who won three Olympic victories between 364 and 356 (Lehmann 1995). His somewhat swollen ears are the only indication of his *métier*. In the Hellenistic period images of athletes are even less idealized; the energized bronze jockey found off the coast of Cape Artemision in Euboia resembles a street urchin rather than a noble equestrian (Hemingway 2004).

5 The Sociopolitical Context

We will end this essay with three specific case studies of known athletes whose imagery survives in part: Phayllos of Croton, an eminent pentathlete; Theagenes of Thasos, a renowned boxer; and Ladas, a celebrated runner. All three instances exemplify the power of images in ancient Greece.

Phayllos was famous for winning three victories at the Pythian Games at Delphi (two in the pentathlon and one in the footrace) and for commanding the only West Greek ship at the Battle of Salamis in 480 (Golden 2004: 131–2). His name appears on four Athenian red-figure vases from c.500: on the reverse of an amphora in Munich, where he is the central figure about to throw the discus (Munich 2308; BAPD 200161); on a neck amphora formerly in Malibu (and now repatriated to Rome), where he is again preparing to hurl the discus (BAPD 16321); among 12 athletes and trainers shown on a psykter (wine cooler) in Boston, where he is training a javelin thrower (Boston 01.8019; BAPD 200134); and on a psykter in Turin, where he is shown holding a strigil (Turin 4123; BAPD 200140). In all instances he is depicted as a young, beardless male. These multiple appearances on symposium vessels of a contemporary and much admired athlete demonstrate the popularity of victorious competitors among adult males in Athens. And because it was unusual to depict living persons in Athenian sculpture, a marble statue base of c.480 with his name found on the Acropolis (Epigraphical Museum 6379) testifies to his renown.

Theagenes was a celebrated all-around athlete with over a thousand victories in various games and an object of cultic worship after his death (Golden 2004: 163). He was the first to win in both boxing and the *pankration* in two successive Olympic Games, and he was proclaimed victor in both contests on the same day at the Pythian Games at Delphi. Inscribed statue bases recording his numerous wins, including the footrace at Argos, survive at Delphi and his hometown of Thasos. His statue at Thasos ostensibly fell over and killed a man, and so the Thasians tossed it into the sea. Soon after the island suffered a famine and the Delphic oracle attributed it to their neglect of the great Theagenes. Fishermen found the statue and when it was reerected the famine ceased. Thereafter they sacrificed to Theagenes “as to a god.”

Finally, we turn to Ladas (Christesen 2013; Golden 2004: 95) and a beautiful ode to his (now lost) sculptural likeness, which more than any extant imagery testifies to the power of art to evoke the beauty and agility of the ancient athlete:

As you were in life, Ladas, flying before
wind-foot Thymos,

barely touching the ground with
the tips of your toes,
just so did Myron cast you in bronze,
engraving all over your body
expectation of the crown of Pisa.
He is full of hope, with the breath
on the tips of his lips
blowing from within his hollow ribs;
bronze ready to jump
out for the crown – the base cannot
hold it back;
Art swifter than the wind.

(*Anthologia Graeca* 16.54, trans. S. Miller)

ABBREVIATIONS

BAPD = Beazley Archive Pottery Database

(www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/databases/pottery.htm)

NOTES

1 Quoted in Baker 1988: 254.

2 This powerful emphasis on the importance of athletic victory, as opposed to participation, eroded somewhat starting in the Hellenistic period. See Chapter 24 in this volume.

3 All dates are BCE unless otherwise noted.

4 On a special group of Athenian black-figure vases known as the Perizoma Group, athletes are depicted wearing white loincloths. Because all of these have been found in Etruria, it seems that this show of modesty was dictated by a market preference. See Shapiro 2000. Also see Chapter 26 in this volume.

5 The socioeconomic status of regular sport participants in fifth- and fourth-century Athens continues to be debated by modern-day scholars. Some (see, for example, Pritchard 2004) argue that sport during those centuries remained the preserve of a small group of elites, others (see, for example, Fisher 2011 and Christesen's essay on sport and democratization, Chapter 13) argue that most men from what we could call the middle class also regularly participated in sport.

6 On Panathenaic amphorae, see Kyle 1996; Bentz 1998; and the essays in Palagia and Choremi-Spesieri 2007.

7 Pausanias (6.15.8) elsewhere mentions the statue of a boy athlete,

Eutelidas of Sparta, who won in wrestling and the *pankration* in 628. If his statue were contemporary with his victory it would predate that of Praxidamas. On victor statues, see Hyde 1921; Thomas 1981; Lattimore 1988; Raschke 1988b; Steiner 1998 and 2001; O'Sullivan 2003; and Smith 2007.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

A good general introduction to Greek art can be found in Pedley 2012. Miller 2004 is a generously illustrated survey of Greek athletics. Some of the best illustrations of sport in Greek art can be found in the full-color exhibition catalogues that appear regularly to coincide with iterations of the modern Olympic Games: Tzachou-Alexandri 1989; Neils 1992; Vanhove 1992; Neils and Tracy 2003; Hermann and Kondoleon 2004; Kaltsas 2004; Stampolidis and Tassoulas 2004; Valavanis 2004; Dozio, Fallani, and Soldini 2009. Kephaliidou 1996, while in modern Greek, is the best source for the imagery of victors in Athenian vase painting.

CHAPTER 6

Inscriptions as Evidence for Greek Sport

H. W. Pleket

1 Introduction

Concentrating on Greek sport in Hellenistic (323–31 BCE) and Roman (31 BCE–476 CE) times, this essay demonstrates the enormous evidential value of inscriptions by discussing four themes: (1) the ancient *gymnasion* as the foundation of mass sport, (2) the agonistic “market,” (3) associations of athletes, and (4) athletes’ social status and values. To research such themes modern historians go to archives and find detailed information from newspapers, diaries, photographs, and more. Ancient historians’ “archives,” however, are very different.

In addition to literary works (on which see Chapters 4 and 27 in this volume), ancient historians examine material evidence including art, especially vase painting and sculpture (see Chapters 5 and 28), ruins of facilities, pottery, and coins. (See Golden 1998: 47–62 for a discussion of the various types of evidence for ancient Greek sport.) We also occasionally find athletic equipment or votive dedications (e.g., discuses and figurines), mostly from burials or sanctuaries. Our closest parallel to “archives,” however, is the wealth of inscriptions relating to games, facilities, and athletes, which provide abundant and reliable testimony for Greek sport.

Our use of ancient “archives” requires explanation. First, papyrus and parchment documents from Classical antiquity do not survive in any number except in Egypt. Next, the ancients themselves selected only a limited number of their documents for publication on durable material (predominantly stone, in exceptional cases, bronze). Also, only part of this ancient selection has survived to the present. So, we

do have “archives” but with a limited number of documents. Nevertheless, compared to later preindustrial European times, the ancient world was, in the dictum of Louis Robert, the best epigraphist of the twentieth century, a “civilisation de l’épigraphie” (Robert 1989a: 66, 70).

Various categories of inscriptions contribute to sport history: epitaphs (in prose or poetry) of deceased athletes; dedications by successful athletes (D’Amore 2009); epigrams (with or without lists of victories) engraved on statue bases erected by the athletes themselves, their cities, or trainers; honorary inscriptions for athletes erected by themselves, family members, their mother cities, or, in post-Classical times, by professional associations of athletes; and letters of Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors concerning *gymnasia* or athletes.

We do not assume that inscriptions give us objective knowledge. Inscriptions represent what those who erected them wanted the reader to think about the person being honored. In short, inscriptions offer “constructs” of historical reality. That said, by looking at hundreds of inscriptions from various times and places, it becomes possible to reconstruct a dominant mentality shared by many people over long periods, not just the views of a small number of elite literati (Robert 1989a: 78, 85).

Obviously, without literary sources we would not be able to fit all the details provided by our “archive” into the general mosaic of a past society. Without literary sources what would we make of the sudden mention of the Olympic or Panathenaic Games in an athlete’s inscribed victory catalog? Literary sources enable the epigraphist to contextualize the knowledge generated by inscriptions.

Nonetheless, literary sources have shortcomings that can in part be made good through careful study of inscriptions. A general problem with literary sources is the difficulty of determining how and how much an author’s selection of materials and personal interpretations refract the realities of the world in which he lived. Literary sources reflect the ideas of the author and his readers or listeners, typically the literary elite, and offer invaluable information about criticisms of, and feelings of anxiety, unease, and ambiguity about athletes and institutionalized athletics. Undoubtedly such feelings existed but to what extent were ambiguity and unease perceived by the athletes, their relatives and colleagues, the masses of spectators, and the political entities that consistently honored and privileged them? William Slater has recently suggested that the “emphasis on . . . elite tension and ambiguity clothes old clichés of over-productive moralists in modern terminology” (2010b: 537). Reconstructing the self-perceptions of those involved in sport is best done on the basis of the

numerous documents they themselves produced.

Inscriptions reveal athletes (and games) never mentioned in literary sources, their achievements and values, their social status, their organizations, and their position in society at large. They attest to the fundamental importance of athletes and athleticism in urban life, and the recognition of that importance by local and super-regional authorities. In Robert's words (1989a: 82): "It is inscriptions, in their mass and geographical variety, which alone make it possible to write the history of Greek athletic festivals over the course of the Hellenistic and Roman periods."

2 The *Gymnasion* in Hellenistic and Roman *Poleis*

In the mid-second century CE the Greek sophist Aelius Aristides wrote in a panegyric on the Roman Empire that "all localities are full of *gymnasia*" (*Roman Oration* 97). Some may distrust this text as overt flattery, but we do know of *gymnasia* in a multitude of cities. A *gymnasion* was regarded as an indispensable institution for any settlement that considered itself a *polis* (city-state). It was such a normal part of a city that Robert once imaginatively called it "the second *agora*" (Robert 1969: 814, n. 3). (On the history and architecture of *gymnasia* and of related structures called *palaistrai*, see Chapter 19.)

Inscriptions are essential to our understanding of the *gymnasion* in Hellenistic and Roman cities (Pleket 2000a: 629–40). Who was in charge? A large corpus of inscriptions show that from the end of the fourth century BCE in Athens and elsewhere, the gymnasiarch ("*gymnasion* director") was an elected annual magistrate. Study of some 50 honorary decrees for gymnasiarchs (Fröhlich 2009), spread over many cities and centuries, has shown that until the second half of the second century BCE gymnasiarchs invested money in the maintenance of *gymnasia*, athletic programs, and prizes, and they were responsible for the orderly and disciplined behavior of visitors. A recent suggestion is that in the Late Hellenistic period the gymnasiarch's function was reduced to donating large quantities of oil and fragrant unguents, and that this focus on oil and unguents reflects both the gradual transformation of the *gymnasion* into a sort of bath building in the Roman fashion, and a corresponding decline of athletic practices. Since scraps of evidence attest ongoing athletic activities both in and outside *gymnasia*, it seems likely that the practice of

athletics was not replaced by but rather was supplemented with a culture of relaxation and bathing (Pleket 2000a: 634–5). A letter of Pliny the Younger (*Epistles* 10.39) to the city of Nikaia in Asia Minor confirms “the centrality of the gymnasium to civic life” (König 2010: 14; see [Map 6.1a–b](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay).

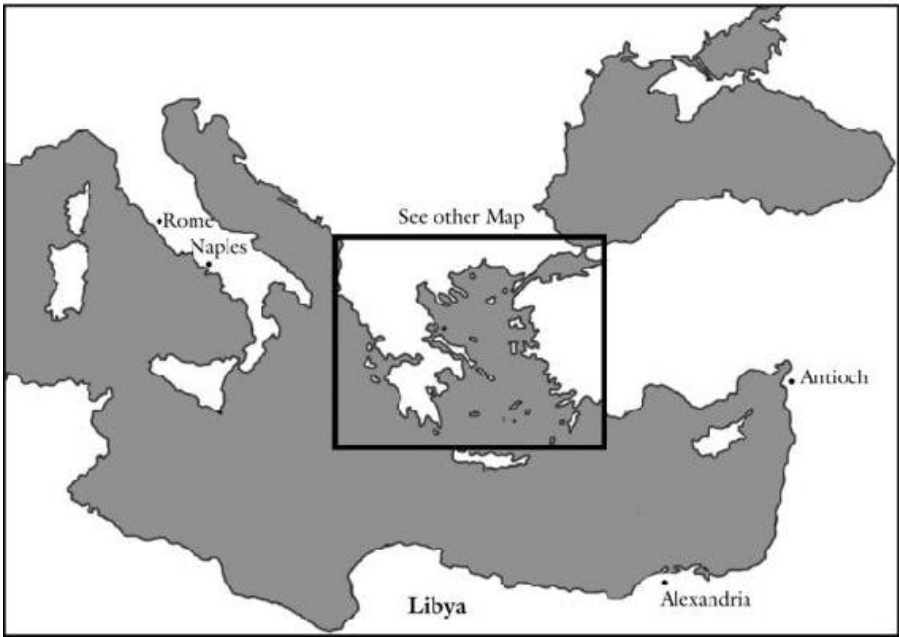
Studies of the physical elements in *gymnasion* education in most Hellenistic cities are dependent upon the abundant epigraphic evidence. Hellenistic catalogs of victors in contests held in the *gymnasion* confirm what Philippe Gauthier wrote about this institution as “a place of training in physical and military activities” (2010: 92). Ephebes (cadets) and young men competed for victory in running, wrestling, boxing, and *pankration*. (On ephebes, see Chapter 14.) A newly discovered inscription from Mylasa in western Asia Minor shows how urban *paidonomoi* (magistrates responsible for the education of boys) subjected the local boys to “training in physical activities” and “the contests organized in the *palaistra*, the races, wrestling, boxing, and *pankration*.” In the later Hellenistic period “courses of study” (*mathemata*) and “public lectures” (*akroaseis*) were added to the curriculum. Honorary inscriptions for gymnasiarchs, who invited the instructors, inform us about these practices (Gauthier 2010: 93–4). A recent study of the Athenian *ephebeia* and the developments in its physical and intellectual training programs is largely based on inscriptions (Perrin-Saminadayar 2007).

We knew from other inscriptions that cities issued laws about *gymnasia*, but the discovery and publication of the so-called gymnasiarchal law from Beroia in Macedonia (mid-second century BCE) was particularly revolutionary (Gauthier and Hatzopoulos 1993). Abounding in a variety of detailed regulations, this text shows that the *gymnasion* “was entirely dedicated to athletic and military training” (Gauthier 2010: 93). (For further discussion of this inscription, see Chapter 22.) Other new finds from Macedonian cities testify to athletic training in local *gymnasia* and subsequent participation in renowned “international” contests. One text explicitly records how urban gymnasiarchs were ordered to register athletes who happened to disembark at their cities on their way to participate in contests elsewhere in Macedonia (Gauthier and Hatzopoulos 1993: 155–65). Brief abstracts of an “ephebarchic law” from Amphipolis (24/3 BCE), whose publication is long overdue, offer insight into the basic components of the education of ephebes in the *gymnasion*: military and athletic training; contests in the *gymnasion*; and visits, supervised by the ephebarch (magistrate in charge of the ephebes), to contests outside the *gymnasion*, with the special proviso of “watching the games in silence and with dignity,” a concrete example of the

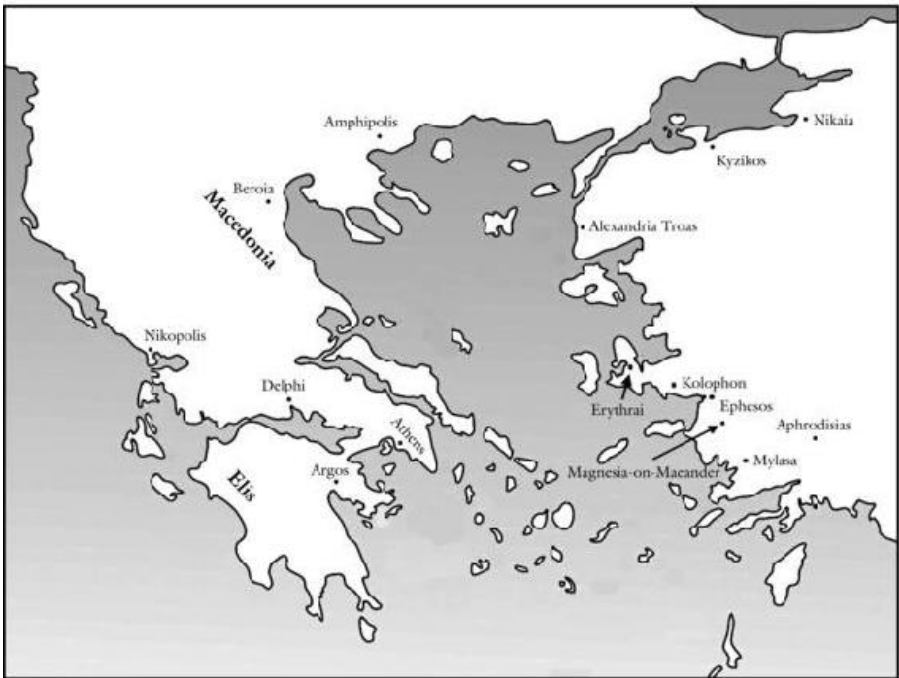
eukosmia (orderly conduct) expected of *gymnasion* visitors in general (Gauthier and Hatzopoulos 1993: 69, 161–3, 173–6).

Map 6.1a–b Key sites mentioned in this essay.

(a)



(b)



Thus physical activity was pervasive in *gymnasia*, which provided the infrastructure of ancient sport and constituted the bridge that urban youngsters crossed to participate in contests in the world at large. A second-century BCE decree of the city of Kolophon in Asia Minor for a certain Polemaios exemplifies this phenomenon: “while he was still an ephebe, a regular attendee at the *gymnasion*, having nourished his soul with the most excellent studies and trained his body by the habit of physical exercises, he won crowns in the sacred contests” (Gauthier 2010: 93).

3 The Agonistic Market

Around 150 CE Aelius Aristides wrote that there was an “infinite number of contests [*agones*]” in the Roman Empire (*Roman Oration* 99), but his statement is hardly precise. Many centuries earlier the poet Pindar regularly praised his victorious athletic “clients” for their performances in major Panhellenic athletic contests and in other less conspicuous games, and, in passing, he would refer to victories in other contests as numerous as pebbles on the beach. (On Pindar, see Chapter 4.) However, it is inscriptions and coins (Leschhorn 1998, 2004; Klose 2004a, b) that demonstrate the actual number of contests celebrated in the Greek world before and during the Roman period. Robert (1989b: 709–19) has pointed out that in the Hellenistic period many so-called sacred-crown games were founded and widely advertised.

In the same period it became a regular phenomenon to honor a victorious athlete with an epigram inscribed on stone, which in poetic form mentioned many of the athlete’s more significant previous triumphs. During the Roman period, prose catalogs were frequently added, dryly and meticulously listing the dozens of victories gained by the honorand (and the records achieved by him) (Moretti 1953; Ebert 1972). A variant was an honorary text inscribed on the statue of the athlete, listing the positions the athlete held after his retirement in athletic associations, his “records” and honorific epithets, and his athletic victories.

Large numbers of inscriptions (and coins also), especially from Asia Minor, inform us about “local games” in a large variety of cities, thereby bringing to life Aristides’ “infinite number of *agones*.” We hear about dignitaries responsible for such games and about local stars winning in them. Studies continue to appear on games epigraphically attested in specific cities and areas (Pleket 1998a).

This complex web of evidence enabled Leschhorn (1998) to

calculate that there were at least five hundred separate athletic contests in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in the first through third centuries CE. This constitutes the “agonistic market” that grew with the expansion of Greek civilization in the territories of what is now Turkey, the Near East, and Libya, and peaked with increasing urbanization and prosperity in the Roman period.

Athletic contests fell into two broad categories: sacred-crown games (*agones hieroi kai stephanitai*, sometimes known as stephanitic games), which offered only wreaths as prizes, and money games (sometimes known as chrematitic games), in which prizes of cash or other valuables were given (see Remijsen 2011). In the first century BCE and the first century CE, the *periodos* (circuit), which originally consisted of the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games, the most prestigious of the sacred-crown games, was extended with three other games (the Capitolia in Rome, the Actia in Nikopolis, and either the Heraia in Argos or the Sebasta in Naples) into the *teleios periodos* (“complete, perfect periodos,” Frisch 1991). In long catalogs of victories the Olympic Games always ranked first. Well into the fourth century CE athletes from all over the Roman world still thought the Olympics worthwhile (Wallner 2008).

Over time many more sacred-crown games were founded. Some were called Olympia or Pythia, others, more modestly, were “isolympic” (modeled on and equal to the Olympics) or “isopythian.” In the Roman period about twenty “Olympic Games” are attested, organized by various cities throughout the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean (Farrington 1997: 41–3). Several cities, other than Delphi, organized Pythia (Pleket 1998b: 130). Scholars have recently debated, relying on inscriptions as evidence, the extent to which some sacred-crown games added valuable prizes to their perishable wreaths, in the form of objects of precious metal (e.g., gold wreaths) or cash (Pleket 2004; Le Guen-Pollet 2007; Slater 2010a; Slater 2012).

Honorary inscriptions faithfully reflect the hierarchy in the agonistic market: victories in sacred-crown games are diligently enumerated first, with those in the *periodos* given primacy, and sometimes with the addition of “now sacred” games (a reference to an upgraded local money game). At the end of such a catalog only the total number of victories in money games is given, without any specification. In one case an athlete won in 50 crown and 150 money games, another was successful in 29 sacred and 127 money games, in addition to draws in the finals of 10 other contests. Yet another simply says: “I won in 86 money games” (Pleket 2001: 192).

Successful athletes clearly could accumulate quite a bit of money. Less talented colleagues perhaps restricted themselves to local games, assuming that the stars could not participate in all those events. In

addition to direct monetary profit, athletes could expect indirect benefits (Robert 1989a: 356–7): attractive privileges in their home city, including free meals in the city hall; immunity from taxation; and, in the Roman period, special allowances for success in so-called entry games (*agones eiselastikoi*). (For further discussion of *agones eiselastikoi*, see Chapter 24.)

The existence of a busy agonistic market for athletes traveling from one contest to the other is confirmed by inscriptions in which the victor is said to have won games “all over the inhabited world, from the Capitolia Games [in Rome] to the Antiochia Games in Syria.” Other texts solemnly proclaim that the honorand competed and won in contests “in Asia, Italy, Greece, and Alexandria” (Robert 1989b: 320–1 and 399).

Obviously, in such a crowded market the need for a well-organized agonistic calendar arose, so that overlapping contests would not prevent athletes from participating in their favorite tournaments. An inscription from Aphrodisias in Asia Minor states that a new local contest, organized in commemoration of (and financed through a testamentary endowment by) a local member of the elite, should be inserted into the local calendar in such a way as to enable athletes to travel to Rome for participation in the Capitolia (Roueché 1993: no. 51). Another letter by Hadrian from Alexandria Troas reconstructs in great detail the well-organized calendar of a large number of renowned “international” sacred-crown games over a period of four years. It precisely indicates the duration of specific contests and the travel time participants would need to go from one city to another (Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: ll. 57–84). In that calendar there are empty spaces, giving athletes time to compete in local, money games. Moreover, Hadrian’s regulations also facilitated decisions to skip one or more important festivals and, with the time thus saved, to visit other cities and to try to make some money in local prize games (cf. Strasser 2004/5: 438).

4 Associations of Athletes

With inscriptions and papyri as almost the sole relevant sources (see Pleket 1973), we do not know precisely when athletic associations (sometimes called guilds in the modern scholarship) were created, nor where they had their first headquarters. The earliest known mention of them occurs in an honorary inscription, dated to the first century BCE and found in Erythrai in Asia Minor, for a successful, deceased athlete. At the time there were two associations: one comprised “the

ecumenical athletes,” the other “the ecumenical sacred crown-victors” (i.e., an association of winners in major contests). With headquarters probably in a major city in Asia Minor, perhaps Ephesos, the associations defended existing privileges of their members and advocated new ones. The more elite association organized its own sacred-crown contest, probably somewhere in Asia Minor (Robert 1949: 122–3). The very existence of such associations, probably founded in the Late Hellenistic period, is significant. It may well reflect the increasing number of contests and competitors, the concomitant “professionalization” of sport, the need for coordinated defense of the athletes’ interests, and the corresponding willingness of authorities to acknowledge the importance of this branch of “the economy.”

At some time in the Roman period the two associations apparently merged into one group of “athletes and sacred victors” and established its headquarters in Rome. Hadrian ordered that a piece of land, containing an archival building and a precinct (*temenos*), be given to the association, and Antoninus Pius (ruled 138–61 CE) actually implemented the project. As a result, the association settled down “near the Baths of my grandfather Divus Traianus, where you used to gather for the Capitolia” (*Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae* 236, ll. 10–13; Pleket 1973: 223). Rome also housed the headquarters of another association, either in the same or a separate building: “the sacred, athletic association of those around Herakles, who after their retirement have their domicile in the imperial capital of Rome” (*Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae* 237).

In addition to the full title of the association (“sacred wandering association of athletes and sacred crown-victors worshipping Herakles,” sometimes adorned with the addition of various adulatory adjectives such as “august”), the sources record the mysterious “Entire Portico” (*ho sympas xystos*). Strasser has identified the latter as the “principal organ of the general association of athletes” (2001: 143; cf. Pleket 2010: 188). “The Portico” was an executive board consisting of five dignitaries: high priest (of the *temenos*), lifelong xystarch, Director of the Imperial Baths, chief secretary (Strasser 2001: 145–6), and chief physician (Robert 1950: 25–7). The first three offices apparently were held simultaneously by three people, each of whom held all three titles (Frisch 1986: 119–21; Strasser 2001: 145–6). The fact that some of the officials in charge of the association had the title “Director of the Imperial Baths” (establishments that included both baths and a full suite of athletic facilities) clearly points to the close links between emperor and athletes.

A xystarch was a commissioner appointed by the emperor to superintend a contest or a series of contests in a given city or region.

What exactly he was supposed to superintend is uncertain, but it seems probable that the xystarch supervised the financial management of the contests rather than the discipline of the athletes (Pleket 2012; Robert 1966: 82). Local elites had substantive fiscal responsibilities, and financial chaos was the last thing emperors wanted.

Diverting athletic funds for other purposes occurred in Greek cities, and emperors disliked it. The recent Hadrianic letters shed light on the problem (Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: ll. 8–26). In principle, emperors probably recruited xystarchs from among retired athletes. Strasser argues that it was a position held by retirees but not right away after their retirement (2003: 298). Long before an association of retired athletes existed, we hear about a successful wrestler who “after his retirement” served in Nero’s reign as xystarch in various cities in Asia Minor. Hadrian honored another athlete (a pankratiast), from Magnesia-on-Maeander in Asia Minor, with Roman citizenship and the “*xystarchia* of the contests in Kyzikos,” probably again prior to the existence of the association of retirees (Moretti 1953: nos. 65, 71). Most other xystarchs are known from inscriptions dated to periods well after the presumed date of the creation of that association. They were often selected from the top officials of the “Entire Portico,” some of whom, as already noted, carried the title of lifelong xystarch. A famous example is the star pankratiast Marcus Aurelius Demonstratos Damas, who, after a distinguished athletic career, became high priest, Director of the Baths, and lifelong xystarch. In an honorary inscription erected by his four sons, a long list of victories in distinguished contests is followed by a list of 13 *xystarchiai* held in cities in Asia Minor, Egypt, and Italy (Strasser 2003: 264).

Until quite recently we had no idea how a xystarch’s activities were financed (e.g., travel costs, lodging, food). Hadrian’s new letter also fills this gap: “Let the athletes give the fixed hundredth, since they both share in their profession and compete under their direction.” Athletes thus contributed 1 percent, probably of their prize money, for the xystarch’s maintenance. Deficits were to be paid either by the organizing city or the individual in charge of organizing the contest in question. Apparently a minimum allowance had been established for the commissioner, since otherwise it is hard to account for the concept of a deficit (Petzl and Schwertheim 2006, ll. 34–9).

5 Athletes: Social Status and Values

A lively debate has continued for decades about the social background of Greek athletes and how that might have changed over time, but most scholars would now agree that members of the elite were always present on the athletic scene. In the Archaic period (700–480 BCE), they predominated; while few deny the *possibility* that in Archaic Greece boys from poor families might succeed as athletes on the basis of sheer talent, most scholars agree that the *probability* was slight, certainly for boys from poor families who hardly enjoyed enough leisure for physical exercises (Pleket 1992). In later periods individuals from nonelite families also participated, though discussion continues as to the extent to which they did so and the chronology of the resulting shifts in the demographics of sport (see Chapter 13).

In the fifth century and certainly before 400 BCE the rise of the *gymnasion* “leveled the playing field to some degree, making facilities available to those outside the elite” (Golden 1998: 144). In practical terms this probably meant not that the poor regularly visited the *gymnasion*, but rather that the institution became accessible for middle-class boys, who if successful in local festivals might subsequently compete at the Olympic level. A supercilious complaint by Alcibiades, scion of a wealthy Athenian family, about athletes “of lowly birth, from small towns and poorly educated” (Isocrates 16.33) participating at Olympia c.400 BCE does not necessarily imply that they rose from among the lowest strata of the population. His disdain and snobbery certainly allows the inclusion of males from upper and lower middle-class families (Pleket 2000b: 289–90).

Training in the *gymnasion* was the starting point for an athletic career but, for success on the international scene, private and relatively expensive trainers were indispensable. An Ephesian inscription (c.300 BCE) shows that a promising young athlete needed subsidy from the city “for training and staying abroad” (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 54.1182; Brunet 2003). By that time the athletic scene was shared by both elites and nonelites. Several inscriptions implicitly or explicitly show that many successful athletes throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods came from urban elite families (Pleket 2001: 204–7; 2005). Unfortunately, many athletes remain just names; their social backgrounds are unknown. Although some papyri document athletes who were illiterate and therefore very probably of nonelite provenance, what Onno van Nijf recently wrote about the “clients” of *gymnasion* education can probably be applied to the social background of Hellenistic and Roman era athletes in general: “It will not have extended much beyond a broad middle-class” (van Nijf 1999: 190).

Inscriptions show that males from elite families excelled not only in the “light events” (running, pentathlon), but also in combat sports

(boxing, wrestling, *pankration*), wherein wounds and injuries were common. In the long list of Olympic winners, there is just one significant addition to the name of a victorious boxer: *atraumatistos* (“unwounded,” Robert 1989b: 369–72)! The elite continued to value athletics highly: “Sport and literature are more or less equivalent and combinable signs of true *paideia*, Greek culture” (van Nijf 1999: 184).

From early times athletic ideology was an exclusively aristocratic affair. Young has recently argued “that [the poet] Pindar . . . ranks physical/athletic excellence and mental/intellectual excellence equally, all on the same high plane” (2005: 26). “Bodily excellence” boiled down to physical beauty and strength, and Pindar also emphasizes the manly and military values of sport (see Chapter 4). After Pindar, sport, as it became more competitive and specialized, was strongly criticized by intellectuals (see Chapter 21), but values in the world of practicing athletes remained consistently aristocratic in later periods. An honorary epigram from 49 CE praises a young pankratiast for his beauty and strength (Moretti 1953: no. 64). Military or paramilitary virtues regularly occur in athletic inscriptions. *Andreia* (courage), *ponos* (toil), *philoponia* (love of toil), and *karteria* (endurance) are keywords in documents of praise. Robert has shown that *karteria* is typical of both athletes who “endure” in order either to win or to die, and of soldiers (1989b: 82–93). A second-century CE Olympic boxer prayed to Zeus for “either the wreath or death.” Precisely the same phraseology occurs in an epitaph of a citizen soldier. *Philoponia* was a cardinal virtue in *gymnasion* education, together with *eutaxia* (discipline). Both values characterized both the athlete and the soldier (Pleket 2005: 161–3).

An overriding value was the everlasting glory of the victorious athlete. *Kudos*, *kleos*, and *eukleia* – all words closely linked to glory – were prominent in Pindar and never disappeared as long as ancient athletics survived. Glory and prestige were characteristic and highly appreciated assets for members of a competitive society. The glory of successful athletes usually was also the glory of their home cities. Slowly, however, the feeling rose that victory in itself was not enough: a “surplus” value was needed; this feeling helped produce an ideology of “records” (Pleket 1975: 79).

Ancient sport had its own concept of “records” (Young 1996). Obviously the “surplus” value grows in proportion with the status of the contests in which one won. Runners prided themselves on having won both the *stadion* and *diaulos*, or, even better, these two races and also the *hoplitodromos*, either in one contest or in consecutive ones (Brunet 2010). If a runner won three different races at a single athletic festival, the special title of *triastes* was acquired; to have done so on one day gave additional luster (Robert 1967: 114). A special surplus

value was winning in the *stadion*, *diaulos*, and *dolichos*. Long and shorter races were different disciplines, so such an achievement was rare. (For more information about these events, see Chapter 1.)

Combat sports allowed quite a few special records to be set. In wrestling, it was a special feature to win *aptos* (without taking a fall), *amesolabetos* (without having been caught in a waistlock), or *anephedros* (without sitting out a round, i.e., without having had a bye) (Brunet 2010). The last epithet could also be applied in boxing and *pankration*, sports without rounds or weight classes. Since these grueling events were scheduled one after another in the program, a combined victory in boxing and *pankration* seldom took place (Strasser 2003: 278–81) and brought additional glory.

Other records, especially in combat sports, concerned so-called *akoniti* (“dustless”) victories, in which no one dared to register and face a formidable star. Opponents sometimes withdrew even on the local level. One inscription from the interior of Asia Minor says that in a local contest athletes refrained from competing after the predictable winner “had taken off his clothes” (Robert 1949: 110)! Winning was the supreme value, but losing brought disgrace and might better be avoided. In a variant of the *akoniti* victory the winner proudly proclaims to have “stopped his opponents either before the drawing of lots [for pairings] began altogether or during the drawing for the second or third round” (Robert 1949: 106–11).

In all disciplines the pinnacle was proclaiming solemnly that, whatever record had been set, one did it as the first of one’s city, region, or province. One athlete even claimed that he was “the first of mankind” to have achieved combined victories in various combinations of boxing, wrestling, and *pankration* (Moretti 1953: no. 68; Wallner 2001: 96–108).

The absolute peak of athletic braggadocio occurs in a long honorary inscription for a star pankratiast of the second half of the second century CE, M. Aurelius Asklepiades. After a brief enumeration of high social distinctions (honorary citizenships, membership of various urban councils, high positions in the association of athletes after his retirement), the real “pride catalog” begins with the general remark that he was an “unbeatable *periodonikes* [someone who had won at least one victory at each of the games in the *periodos*].” A long list of “extras” follows: “he never left his feet,” “he never intimidated an opponent nor was he himself ever intimidated by an opponent,” “he never had a draw in the finals,” “he never excused himself from a contest [whether injured or ill, he always performed],” “he never won in a new contest” (the old *periodos* or similar games were far more prestigious), and “he never owed a victory to imperial favor” (i.e., when the emperor was present and sometimes even presided). After

these claims comes a dry list of the sacred-crown contests in which he won. A brief reference to victories in “[many] more money games” concludes the self-advertisement (Moretti 1953: no. 79).

Lesser stars had their own boastful epithets. Those familiar with the niceties of athletic distinctions sensed that, although calling oneself a *nemeonikes* (a victor at the Nemean Games, just one of the four games that made up the *periodos*) was a far cry from being a *periodonikes*, a *nemeonikes* was nonetheless clearly superior to an athlete priding himself on being a victor in one of the innumerable local money games in the Greek East. Such an athlete may have made a lot of money, but the *periodos* was far beyond his potential (Pleket 1998a: 160). Some local stars, however, were ambitious and tried to enter the great games. One of them proudly proclaims that he “had been admitted to the Olympics” (i.e., survived the initial screening of potential participants). In effect, this proud but modestly talented athlete is saying: “I performed at Olympia, but I admit that I was soon eliminated” (Pleket 2000b: 285–6).

Despite literary criticisms of overly developed, specialized, and unintelligent athletes, inscriptions attest a positive concept of the successful athlete who combines physical and intellectual qualities. In a decree of the synod of athletes from the reign of Hadrian, the pankratiast Kallikrates, a *periodonikes*, is praised for combining from his earliest youth “the ways of virtue” with “sweat and labor”; accordingly he was said to be admired throughout the inhabited world “for the complete wisdom that he obtained by his labors” (Roueché 1993: no. 89). He took care equally of his physique and his soul. In a third-century CE text the city of Ephesos praised another pankratiast because he “has undertaken the training of his body, and is also most noble in competition and most dignified in his way of life and his conduct, so that in him *all virtue of body and soul is blended*” (Roueché 1993: no. 89, emphasis added). Another heavy athlete is praised by the city of Elis for his *sophrosyne* (self-restraint, one of the cardinal virtues in philosophy) (*Inschriften von Olympia* 55). (All three of these inscriptions, and others like them, are discussed in van Nijf 2003.) Clearly at least some athletes claimed precisely those qualities which the critics denied them. This does not make these athletes “athlete scholars,” but it does endow them with complementary “philosophical” virtues and bodily qualities. We may even have an exceptional “athlete scholar” in the famous pankratiast M. Aurelius Asklepiades, for he was honored, on the initiative of the emperor, with membership in the Museum in Alexandria (Strasser 2004/5: 442–3).

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

On inscriptions relevant to Hellenistic and Roman sport, Robert’s prodigious contributions are essential; some of them are easily available in *Opera Minora Selecta* volumes 1–7. For the relations between epigraphy and ancient history, Bodel 2001 is essential; for comparison and contrast of the contents of inscriptions and literature from the Roman Imperial period, see König 2005. Inscriptions play an important role in the articles republished in English in König 2010. A convenient “state of the art” exploration of the Hellenistic *gymnasion* can be found in Kah and Scholz 2004. Relevant journals and corpora of inscriptions include: *Nikephoros*, *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, *Epigraphica Anatolica*.

CHAPTER 7

Recent Trends in the Study of Greek Sport

Ingomar Weiler

1 Introduction

My reference work of 1981 on sport in the ancient world, with a large section on Greek sport (Weiler 1981 (1988)), was intended to encourage and assist scholarship on that subject. The study of sport in general was growing in a sometimes sports-obsessed modern world, but it was gratifying to see ancient sport studies grow as well. In 1988 my colleagues and I optimistically began a new annual journal, *Nikephoros*, specifically devoted to ancient sport – broadly interpreted – throughout the world, as a venue for international scholarship, and that journal, with the addition of supplements (e.g., Lee 2001; Crowther 2004), continues to fulfil its function well. Almost every volume contains a detailed, international, indexed annual bibliography of publications on ancient sport prepared by Wolfgang Decker.

A large and growing number of books and articles on ancient Greek sport have been written and edited in recent decades by scholars from several nations. This essay offers a retrospective on trends, developments, and major contributions to the study of ancient Greek sport in the last 10 years (2001–11), with some emphasis on the Archaic (700–480 BCE) and Classical (480–323 BCE) periods. (For brief surveys of earlier historiography on ancient sport, see König 2005: 22–35 and Kyle 2010.) Given the number of publications, a comprehensive treatment would be far too lengthy, so the concentration here is on selected major contributions (mostly books and collections of essays, but also articles). These titles, of course, use,

integrate, and direct readers to further studies on Greek sport. It is important to appreciate the international scope of scholarship on ancient sport, but given the probable nature of our readership, this essay focuses mostly – but certainly not only – on works in English. Consistent with the design of this volume, this study does not concentrate on ancient Olympia, or on the realia of the actual contests, and it leaves aside the question of the modern reception and “revival” of the ancient Olympics. The structure generally follows the organization of the volume’s chapters because that roughly chronological organization also suggests trends and emphases in scholarship. Other essays in this volume often attend to historiography, and in some such instances cross-references are made to those treatments and comments herein are limited.

2 The Origins and Rise of Greek Sport: Agonism and Ethnicity

The traditional notion that Greeks had a unique agonistic spirit has been reevaluated and qualified by scholars: Bignasca 2009 on the origins of agonistics; Wacker 2006 on sport history and *agon*; Ulf 2006, 2008, and 2011; Weiler 2004a and 2010. Recent work has shown that pre- and non-Greek cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world had their own sporting practices, often related to rites or spectacles (see revisionist cautions and abundant and current references in Chapter 2 in this volume; Decker 2004 on early precursors of Greek contests; Decker 2010b on the rise of sports; Scanlon 2009 on broader Mediterranean sport; and Kyle 2007b: 23–53 for a general survey). The Greeks nevertheless remain distinctive for how intimately they associated sport with their ethnicity and their social, cultural, and religious life.

3 Ancient Olympia

Since the ancient Olympics were the most prominent and prestigious of the Greek athletic festivals, and because of suggested associations with the modern Olympics, many works, perhaps too many, are devoted to ancient Olympia. Books and articles, with varying degrees of originality, appear regularly, especially around the occasion of modern Olympic festivals.

Understandably, the Athens Olympics of 2004 inspired interest and publications on the ancient games. Publications in that year include works by Günther; Herrmann and Kondoleon; Kaila, Thrill, Theodoropoulou, *et al.*; Miller; Pleket; Spivey; Tyrrell; Valavanis; Wünsche and Bentz; Young; and more. On earlier such “Olympic” works, see the book reviews in Weiler 2003a. Notably less scholarship appeared at the time of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, although books by T. H. Nielsen and by Schaus and Wenn both came out in 2007, and a second edition of Swaddling’s *The Ancient Olympic Games* appeared in 2008. Kyrieleis’ book on the archaeology of Olympia appeared in advance of the London Olympics of 2012.

Conflicting and confusing ancient myths and speculations suggest very early origins for the ancient Olympics, but archaeologists have challenged the idea that there were significant games around the traditional date of 776 BCE. Valavanis 2006 suggests an early origin and torch ritual; Instone 2007 questions the idea that the Olympic Games originated in burial rites to heroes, and he cautions against monocausal explanations.

The traditional date of 776 for the first Olympiad, based on the Olympic victor list produced by Hippias of Elis in the later fifth century BCE, was disputed even in antiquity, and Christesen’s definitive study of the Olympic victory lists convincingly argues that Hippias’ sources and methods are not reliable for dates before the sixth century; see Christesen 2007a, 2009; also Shaw 2003.

Much recent scholarship on the ancient Olympics tends to demythologize the games, demonstrating a politicized Olympia that, despite its Panhellenic status and famous truce, was not always free of politics, war, violence, or corruption. Golden 2008: 105–39 and 2011 debunk the Olympic truce and other popular illusions about ancient Olympia. See Crowther 2003 on power and politics at Olympia as administered by the *polis* of Elis. Siewert 2001 discusses relevant laws from Elis; T. H. Nielsen 2007 reveals both pride and tensions between Panhellenic Olympia and the culture of the city-states; and Scott 2010 explains the spatial politics of Panhellenism at Olympia. Essays in Hornblower and Morgan 2007 on Pindar’s patrons in various states show their interest in competition and self-representation at major games. Kyle 2009 shows the influence of particularism and the use of claims to piety to justify weak support during the Persian War. Papakonstantinou 2003 treats Alcibiades’ personal political ambitions and his self-display at Olympia.

Good treatments of the program, events, rules, and administration of the ancient Olympics include Lee 2001 on the program and events; Miller 2003, 2004a: 113–28 on the organization and operation of the Olympics around 300 BCE; useful republished articles in Crowther

2004; Perry 2007 on Olympic rules and oaths (cf. Crowther 2007a and 2008); Weiler 2008 on qualifying for the Olympics; and Rutherford 2004 on *theoria* and the Olympic Games.

Schaus and Wenn 2007 includes essays on the judges, jump, losers, sortition, and more, and Egan 2007 suggests another system for deciding the victor in the pentathlon. Combat events retain their fascination – see Corcoran 2003 on rules in wrestling, Brunet 2010 on rules and records, Mauritsch 2008 and 2011 on violence and brutality in heavy athletics, and Visa-Ondarçuhu 2003 and König 2005: 97–152 on the boxer Melankomas.

Increased interest in the experience of spectatorship at Greek athletic festivals relates to facilities, logistics, fair play, and engagement. Relevant here are Petermandl 2005 on the timeless character of spectators; Petermandl 2010 on athletes and spectators, tears, and laughing; Wolicki 2002 on heralds at athletic games; and Rieger 2004 on the arrangements for the start of Panhellenic footraces. An important resource now is the Internet archive of sources on sport spectators from Petermandl and Mauritsch-Bein (2006).

4 The *Periodos*

Our knowledge of the ancient *periodos* or circuit of Panhellenic crown (stephanitic) games at Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea, which emerged by the sixth century and offered only wreath prizes, has been increased by archaeological and interpretive studies.¹ Valavanis 2004 offers excellent overviews of Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea. Papakonstantinou 2002 compares prizes in Homer and tripods at Olympia; cf. Decker 2010a on prizes before the use of money. Davies 2007 discusses literary and archaeological evidence on the origins of the agonistic festivals, especially the Pythian Games. See Neumann-Hartmann 2007 on programs of Panhellenic games in the fifth century BCE. On Delphi and its Pythian festival, Maass 2007 gives a general thematic overview of the site, Amandry 1990 discusses the festival with a particular focus on *theoroi*, Scott 2010 examines the agendas of various visitors to the sanctuary, and Weir 2004 covers the Roman Pythia. On Isthmia, see Kajava 2002 on the return of Isthmian Games to Isthmia in the first century CE.

Publications of the major excavations led by Stephen Miller at Nemea have greatly increased our knowledge and stimulated considerable interest in Greek stadia and their starting mechanisms and entrance tunnels, which Miller suggests indicate attention to

fairness and increased spectatorship. See Miller 2001 on Nemea's Early Hellenistic stadium with its tunnel and *hysplex*, and 2002 on the shrine of Opheltes and the earliest stadium. Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2005 discuss Nemea in Late Antiquity.

5 Local Games

The games of the *periodos* were glorious, but most Greeks experienced sport in athletic festivals and *gymnasia* in their home *poleis* (city-states). Sporting activities and their social and political significance greatly increased in the sixth century as individuals and states competed with each other for status and fame. See Christesen 2007b on the athletic expansion in the sixth century BCE and Forsdyke 2011 on "peer-polity interaction" and competition in the same period. Also see Mann 2001 on politics, athletes, and tensions in various Greek states around 600 and Angeli Bernardini 2005 on the *polis* and *agones*.

Games at Athens, especially in the Great Panathenaic festival, have been reexamined. Neils and Tracy's (2003) small picture book in the *Agora* series and Valavanis 2004: 336–91 are both excellent summaries of the Panathenaia. Palagia and Choremi-Spetsieri's edited volume (2007) offers valuable essays on prizes and events; for example, Neils 2007, which concentrates on what the material evidence from vases, sculpture, and inscriptions reveals about the early development of the festival in relationship to Olympia and Delphi. Shear 2003 is a valuable article reconstructing a famous inscribed Panathenaic prize list. As Kyle (2007b: 150–79) suggests, Athens used the Panathenaic Games and prize amphorae to attract athletes and attention to Athens, and to broadcast the wealth and power of that state.

Perceptions of sport in ancient Sparta have been changed by the work on athletics within Sparta and Spartans competing abroad, especially in Olympic chariot racing (see Chapter 9). Jean Ducat (2006) has persuasively argued that the famous Sparta training regimen, the *agoge*, had strong parallels, at least for males, in other states (initiatory rites, physical education, age groups, etc.).

Publications also have appeared on other local games; for example, Valavanis 2004: 392–7; Zapheiroupolou 2004 on Thessaly; Stampolidis and Tassoulas 2004 on Magna Graecia; and Albanidis and Giatsis 2007 on Thrace. More can be expected.

6 Sport, Classes, and Social Change

Interest in individual competitors, especially Olympic victors and circuit victors, continues; for example, Decker 2008 on new victors from Egypt; Wallner and Uzunaslán 2005 on *periodonikai*; Wallner 2008 on *Olympionikai* in the fourth century CE; Visa-Ondarçuhu 2003; and König 2005: 97–152 on the boxer Melankomas; and Maróti 2005 on Olympic victors who won both as boys and as men. However, as this *Companion* indicates, social historical approaches to groups of people in Greek sport are growing in frequency.

Not just a minimally significant offshoot of military or religious history, sport both influenced – and was influenced by – society. Mark Golden's pioneering scholarship, with his enjoyable writing style, presents sport as a discourse of difference, plus his continued interest in social status and classes (e.g., slaves; also see Weiler 2011) extends over an expanded scope in his 2008 book. Nicholson 2005 applies new historicism to aristocracy and athletics, focusing on the important but seldom acknowledged role of charioteers and trainers.

With socioeconomic change in Archaic and Classical Greece, from the sixth century explosion of games onwards more nonaristocrats started exercising nude in the *gymnasion* and competing at the international and local levels. Debate about the socioeconomic history of sport – class origins, access, mobility – has a long history (see Pleket 2001 on the sociology of ancient sport). Did sport help make Greek states more democratic and meritocratic or did the dominance of elites persist? Disagreement is likely to continue. Pleket 2005 examines the social background of athletes; Pleket 2004a discusses the relationship between money and sport; Pleket 2003 relates economics and urbanization.

Debate has concentrated, without consensus, on Athens because of its relative wealth of information. Kyle's suggestion (2007b: 198–216, see also Chapter 10, his essay on Athens) that elitism persisted is supported by Pritchard (2003, 2004, 2009) with arguments about limited access to physical education; but Fisher (2009, 2011) and Christesen (Chapter 13 and 2012: 145–60) assert widespread participation in liturgically funded Panathenaic tribal and team competitions (including dancing contests).

6.1 Females in ancient Greek sport

Prominent female participation in modern sport has increased

questions about females in ancient Greek sport. Scanlon 2002: 98–198 remains essential on relevant myths, girls' races in the Heraia, and more. While Pomeroy's scholarly 2002 study of Spartan females takes autonomy as a premise, Kyle (2007a, b: 217–28; Chapter 16) suggests caution in interpreting the victories of Kyniska (see also Kyle 2003 and Perry 2007) and the sporting experiences of girls. Debate on the Heraia continues with Langenfeld 2006 and Scanlon's reinforcement of his views (2008). See also Kratzmüller 2002 on female sport in Athens, and Neils's (2012) stimulating art historical interpretation of depictions of sporting females in Athenian vase paintings as seen through Athenian eyes.

7 The Culture of Greek Sport: Religion, Education, and Ideology

7.1 *Religious contexts*

The importance of religion and the festival context at the Panhellenic and local games (and in physical education, as we shall see) is explained by Valavanis 2004 and König 2009a. Mikalson 2007 reviews the notion of divine help in games. De Polignac 2009 revisits his approach to sanctuaries and festivals, and Sinn 1991 and 2000, 2004 as well as Günther 2004 discuss the significance of games in the cult of Olympian Zeus. On magic, see Frass 2008 on “black magic” at Olympia and Tremel 2004 on curses in sport (*magica agonistica*). See also Chapter 20 on the role of religion in Greek sport.

7.2 *Sport and physical education*

Training and testing of sporting bodies went from ritualized initiation to institutionalized education (*paideia*) and cadet training in the *ephebeia*. Scanlon 2002 (64–97, 323–33, and *passim*) on *gymnike paideia* is an important, wide-ranging study, Pritchard 2003 discusses access to education and sport in Athens, and Ducat 2006 shows that Sparta's *agoge* was less exceptional than we had assumed.

With several essays on sport and education, administration, and ephebes and *neoi* in the Hellenistic *gymnasion* (e.g., Weiler 2004a),

Kah and Scholz 2004 is now essential. Also see Kennell 2006 on *ephebeia*, the city-states, and the *gymnasion*; Kennell 2009 on ephebic training in the Greek cities in the Roman Empire; van Nijf 2004a on festivals and physical education in the Imperial era; Nieto Ibáñez 2003 on *paidotribai* and *gymnastai*; Wörrle 2007 on *gymnasia* and gymnasiarchs in Pergamon; König 2005: 315–37 on medicine and training; König 2009b on training in the work of Philostratus, and Albanidis, Romero, and Pavlogiannis 2006 on participation of Greeks and non-Greeks in the *ephebeia* in Hellenistic and Roman eras.

7.3 Nudity and eros: sexuality and pederasty

Scholars now seem to agree on the timing of the introduction of athletic nudity but discussion continues on its significance; see Christesen 2002: 7–37 on nude training in the *gymnasion*. Scanlon 2002 remains a major study on eros and nudity in relationship to education. Perhaps stimulated by modern interests, publications on nudity and homosexuality in ancient sport continue to appear (e.g., Hubbard 2003 on sex in the *gymnasion*; see also Chapters 13 and 15).

7.4 The athletic body

On Greek bodily culture and the athletic body as a cultural symbol, see essays in Mauritsch 2010, including Martínková 2010 on various interpretations of *kalokagathia*. Weiler 2002 discusses inverted *kalokagathia*, and Weiler 2003b evaluates the Greek athlete as a model. Young 2005 provides a valuable critical commentary on the famous phrase *mens sana in corpore sano* (a sound mind in a sound body), and König 2008 discusses the body in ancient novels.

8 Macedonia and Hellenistic Greek Sport

Adams 2003 (and Chapter 22) details Philip and Alexander's use of sport and spectacle as political propaganda and acculturation. Also on Philip and Alexander I, see Kertész 2003, 2005.

We have learned much more about the Ptolemies' use of sport (e.g., victories, festivals) for propaganda from recent scholarship (e.g.,

van Bremen 2007; Shear 2007; Remijsen 2009 and Chapter 23), especially from the discovery of victory epigrams by Posidippos for male and female royal victors (on which see Austin and Bastianini 2002; Bastianini and Gallazzi 2001; Bennett 2005; and Gutzwiller 2005). On *Olympionikai* from Egypt, see Decker 2008.

9 Greek Sport and Rome

Contrary to old assumptions that the Romans could not appreciate Greek sport, recent studies show that Romans adjusted to Greek practices and that Roman rule was positive for Greek sport. Newby 2005 shows that Romans embraced Greek art and architecture. Strong Roman imperial support and expansion of Greek games reflect not simply toleration, but also Roman enthusiasm for Greek athletics at Rome and in the Empire.

Several recent studies look at Greek sport in Rome: Wallner 2002, 2004, 2010 on Greek games and Greek athletics in Rome under the emperors; Siewert 2002 on Sulla and the Olympics; van Nijf 2004b on Roman Olympics; Spawforth 2007 on the Capitolia; Strasser 2001 on Greek games in Rome and Taras; Strasser 2004 on Caracalla and the Antoninia Pythia Games in Rome in 214 CE; Strasser 2010 on the arrangements for the start of footraces in the Roman era; Mann 2002 on the institutionalisation of the *certamina athletarum* in Rome; Klose 1997 on numismatics and the Actian Games; König 2007 on the Severan period; Leschhorn 2004 on sports and imperial coins; and Pleket 2010 on the involvement of Roman emperors in promoting Greek sport (see also Chapter 36).

9.1 Greek sport and the Roman Empire

On Greek sport within the Roman Empire, especially in Asia Minor, König's essential study (2005) uses a nuanced approach to post-Classical literature and epigraphy to read discourses on the body, training, competition, and identity. On the vitality and social and ethnic significance of Greek sport and education for later urban elites in the Greek East, who patronized sport and sought identification with classical athletic culture, van Nijf (2001, 2003, 2004a, 2007) also contributes excellent research. Zuiderhoek 2009 is a fresh study of the motives and practice of euergetism or public benefactions by the elites in Roman Asia Minor, including donations of sport facilities and agonistic festivals.

Also on games and athletes in the Imperial era, see Brunet 2003 on athletes from Ephesos; Albanidis and Giatsis 2007 on athletics in Thrace; Albanidis, Romero, and Pavlogiannis 2006 on the participation of non-Greeks; and Bru 2007 on sport in Roman Syria.

The recent major discovery of three inscribed letters by Hadrian at Alexandria Troas demonstrates this philhellenic emperor's attentiveness to athletic matters of finances, prizes, punishment, and agonistic calendars; see Petzl and Schwertheim 2006; Gouw 2008; and Slater 2008.

On sport and spectacles in Late Antiquity, see Roueché 2007; Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2005 on Nemea; Wallner 2007 on *agones* and *spectacula* in the time of Diocletian; Weiler 2004b on Theodosius and the end of the Olympics; and Crowther 2004: 433–50 on sports violence in the Roman and Byzantine Empires. On Byzantine sport, see Chapter 43.

10 Our Sources: Literary and Material Evidence

Literary studies of Greek sport remain dominated by Homer and Pindar. Ulf 2004 looks at sport in *Iliad* 23, Evans 2006 discusses sport and spectatorship in the *Odyssey*, Papakonstantinou 2002 looks at prizes in Homer, Kyle 2007b: 54–71 discusses prizes and social relations in Homeric sport, Scanlon 2004 relates Homer and the heroic ethos to sport, and Allan and Cairns 2011 examines tensions between individual competitiveness and community in Homer (see also Chapter 3).

Pindaric studies continue with new approaches, such as Nicholson's (2005) use of new historicism (see also Chapter 4). Essays in a major study by Hornblower and Morgan (2007) place Pindar in broader interdisciplinary and historical contexts, showing that Pindar adapted his formal elements to the historical (social, regional) contexts of different patrons and communities. Various essays in that volume offer insights into the early development of festivals and *epinikia*, and the colonial milieu of Cyrene and the West. In addition, Burnett 2005 looks at Pindar on young athletes of Aigina, and Kantzios 2004 is a clear explanation of the Pindaric concept of victory.

Campagner 2001 is a lexicon of agonistic terminology in Aristophanes. Herodotus has been discussed from different angles: Kyle 2009 reexamines Herodotus on athletic festivals and war; Bichler

2008 notes victorious athletes in Herodotus; and T. H. Nielsen 2009 revisits Pheidippides' run from Athens to Sparta.

König has provided insights into discourse on Greek sport in the Roman Empire. His works (2005, 2008, 2009b, 2011) have energized the study of Roman-era sources, notably Philostratus, on training, athletics, and the body.

Material evidence from the archaeological study of facilities (e.g., Miller 2001), prizes, and dedications provides important supplements – and corrections – to the testimony of literary works. Inscriptions contribute invaluable, detailed information on games over expanses of time and space; see Chapter 6 and Pleket 2003. On coins referring to Roman-era games and victors, see Klose 1997, 2004 and Leschhorn 2004. On art in general, see Chapter 5 and Lehmann 2004 on victory statues. For an illustrated Italian work on the ideology and iconography of victory (*Nike*), see Musti 2005.

11 Conclusion

It is difficult to draw conclusions about general trends out of this diversity of topics and treatises, but obviously the quantity and sophistication of publications is growing steadily. Studies of Olympia and the other Panhellenic games are always in the foreground of popular interest, but ongoing archaeology and discoveries from many areas stimulate scholarly research. That research is assisted by reference works and collections of ancient sources, epigraphical and numismatic materials, and prosopographies of athletes.

Researchers remain interested in the origins of sport, and some comparative studies on contests and games in other ancient cultures offer insights. Scholars increasingly study Greek ethnicity, the Greeks' special attitude toward sport, and the significance of local games in Greek city-states. Sport historians have tried to analyze the importance of ideology in sport, and they have demonstrated that ancient sport was embedded in both economics and society.

Other prominent issues include questions about administration and the management of athletic festivals. Treatises often refer to prizes and victories, complex issues of fairness and corruption in sport, the relationship of sport to politics and political systems, the relationship between athletics and warfare, and educational institutions (*gymnasia*, *ephebeia*). Gender studies and questions about body language and bodily culture (including *kalokagathia*) also have attracted attention, as have the role of spectators and ancient sport architecture.

Fine scholarship has detailed the initially ambivalent acceptance of Greek athletics and gymnastics among Romans, and the development and patronage of sport in the Roman Empire. Recent works have clarified relevant processes of acculturation and of cultural exchange.

International work on numerous topics will continue over a broad scope, and, as has happened with the growth of social history and cultural studies in modern sport history, future studies on ancient sport are likely to be less positivistic and more interpretive (e.g., applying new historicism, sociology of sport).

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NOTES

1 The traditional distinction between crown and chrematitic games is based on fourth century BCE literary sources, and Pleket (Chapter 6 in this volume) and Remijsen (Chapter 23 and 2011) have clarified that official inscriptions show that many overlapping classifications arose in the Hellenistic and Roman eras, when crown games, even those of the expanded *periodos*, might offer material prizes. For cautionary comments, see Slater 2012.

2 The first edition of this book was published in German in 1996. An English translation of the first edition appeared in 2000. A second edition of the German version appeared in 2004.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Students and scholars new to the study of Greek sport should start with Miller's excellent illustrated text and sourcebook of translated documents (2004a, b), which cover all aspects of events, operation, sites, and so on. Those primarily interested in the ancient Olympic Games can turn to the many works on that subject that were published in 2004 and Swaddling 2008. As a lavishly illustrated volume, Valavanis 2004 is unsurpassed. Recent broader and comparative works on ancient sport include Kyle 2007b; Crowther 2007b; Newby 2006; Decker and Thuillier 2004; Fisher and van Wees 2011; and Potter 2012.

For reference, Golden 2004 is a helpful lexicon with bibliographical annotations.

Crowther 2004 is very useful with his reprinted essays, bibliographies of his own works (465–71), comments on "recent scholarship" (453–63), and five indices. Volumes of republished important articles include König 2010 and Scanlon's forthcoming Oxford Readings in Ancient Sport.

Insightful essays on Greek sport overall, and trends in the relevant scholarship, include: König 2005: 1–44 and 2009a; Scanlon 2009; de Polignac 2009; Papakonstantinou 2009a, b; and Weiler 2010. In an encouraging development, various recent and forthcoming companions and handbooks on antiquity now include entries on ancient sport (e.g., König 2009a).

The annual volumes of *Nikephoros* consistently attract detailed international scholarship on ancient sport. The yearly bibliographies (*Jahresbibliographie zum Sport des Altertums*) in *Nikephoros* by Wolfgang

Decker are helpful instruments for research and impressive indicators of the growing amount of publication on ancient sport history.

A series of volumes offers collected documents (translated into German) by sport or theme: *Quellendokumentation zur Gymnastik und Agonistik im Altertum* (Weiler, ed.). Such bibliographies and reference works inform us about various aspects, topics, and trends in modern scholarship. See Mauritsch, Petermandl, Pleket, *et al.* 2012.

Notable special journal issues include *International Journal of the History of Sport* 26.2 (2009): “Sport in the Cultures of the Ancient World” and *Journal of Sport History* 30.2 (2003): “The Ancient Olympics in Greek Society and Politics.”

Useful anthologies of essays include Phillips and Pritchard 2003; Bell and Davies 2004; Palagia and Choremi-Spetsieri 2007; and Schaus and Wenn 2007. Festschrifts for Decker (*Nikephoros* 18–19: 2005–6) and for Weiler (Mauritsch, Ulf, Rollinger, *et al.* 2008) add to our resources.

On social history, see the relevant essays and their bibliographies in this *Companion* as well as Christesen 2012; Golden 1998 and 2008; and Pleket 2001. On females in Greek sport, Scanlon 2002: 98–174 is essential, but see also Frass 1997 as well as Kyle 2003, 2007a, and Chapter 16 in this volume.

PART II

Places

CHAPTER 8

Panhellenic Athletics at Olympia

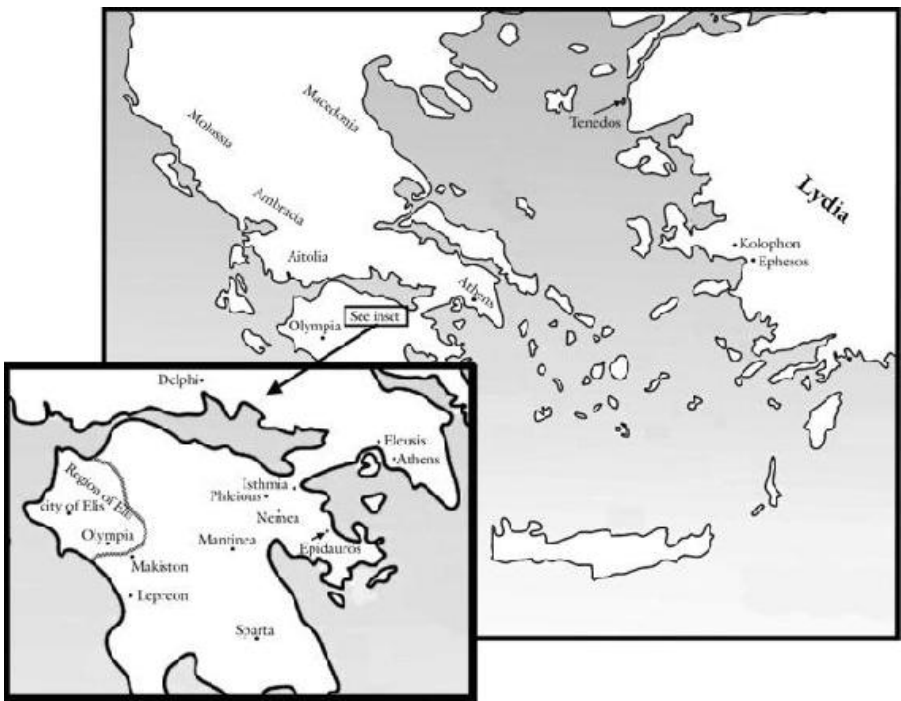
Thomas Heine Nielsen

1 Introduction

Among the defining hallmarks of ancient Greek culture were an extraordinary devotion to sport, a powerful competitive ethos, and the importance of the city-state as a key form of sociopolitical organization. All of these were present in a particularly clear form at Olympia, and the results of their complicated interaction there are among the best illustrations of some of the most important facets of ancient Greek history and of the workings of Greek city-state culture.

Olympia was frequented by massive numbers of Greeks from all over the far-flung Greek world. In this respect, Olympia was a Panhellenic sanctuary in the same way as Delphi. But Olympia was in fact an extra-urban sanctuary of the large city-state of Elis, which arranged and administered the competitions and made its control of the site clear to all (see [Map 8.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay). It was perhaps inevitable that this state of affairs should on occasion generate criticism of Elis for partiality, but in fact Elis's administration of the Olympics seems to have been on the whole reasonably impartial. The general atmosphere at Olympia, however, was highly politicized, and the competitions were conceived of not only as competitions between athletes, but also as competitions between city-states that identified strongly with their athletes.

Map 8.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



2 Olympia as a “Panhellenic” Sanctuary

Scholars customarily describe Olympia as a “Panhellenic” (literally “all-Greek”) sanctuary, and it will be useful to begin by briefly explaining what this means, though it should be emphasized that Olympia was far from being alone in having the qualities that may justify the appellation:

1 Though the Greeks themselves did not call Olympia a “Panhellenic” sanctuary, they did say that “any Greek who wanted” (Herodotus 2.160) could enter its competitions. The competitions, then, were open to every free Greek male (Nielsen 2007: 18–21), but so were a number of other competitions, such as the Asklepieia Games at Epidauros (Sève 1993). The opportunity to participate in the religious life of the sanctuary was also open to all Greeks, though the same was also true of other cults, such as the Mysteries at Eleusis.

2 During the sixth century BCE several sanctuaries incorporated competitions into their festivals, and three of these new sets of competitions, those at Delphi, Isthmia, and

Nemea, achieved a special prestige that resembled that accorded to the Olympics.¹ By the end of the sixth century these four games formed the *periodos* (“tour” or “circuit”) and were timed to ensure that they never overlapped, so that athletes could take part in each in turn (Funke 2005). What distinguished these four from other festivals was the immense symbolic value of victory in their competitions, for which only a crown of leaves was awarded at the site of victory itself. When scholars refer without further specification to “the Panhellenic sanctuaries” the reference is typically to the four sanctuaries of the athletic *periodos*. (See Chapter 1 in this volume for more on the *periodos* and the contests held at these sites.)

3 Olympia, like Delphi and Isthmia, attracted athletes and dedicants from dozens of Greek communities, including communities in distant places such as Sicily and the north shore of the Black Sea. Precise numbers are, in the nature of things, unavailable; it may, however, be noted that the known Olympic victors of the period 480–324 originate from 65 different city-states in various parts of the Greek world (Nielsen 2007: 59–60) and that at least 46 city-states made communal dedications at Olympia in the Late Archaic and Classical periods (Nielsen 2007: 71–8).

Olympia, then, is described as Panhellenic because its competitions were open to all Greeks and because the site itself and its competitions were of such immense prestige as to attract athletes and dedicants from afar. Also, the athletic program at Olympia can be said to have been Panhellenic in the sense that the athletic events at Olympia were practiced all over the Greek world (Young 2004: 24).

Scholars frequently use the term “Panhellenism” to refer to an ancient ideological position that developed in the fifth century and reached its full formulation in the fourth century. Proponents of Panhellenism held that the Greek city-states should end their internal rivalries and wars, unite under the dual hegemony of Athens and Sparta, and wage a war of vengeance and enrichment against the ostensibly weak and effeminate Persians. The basis on which this ideology was constructed was “the notion of Hellenic ethnic identity and the concomitant polarization of Greek and barbarian as generic opposites, which rapidly developed as a result of the Persian invasion [of the early fifth century]” (Flower 2000: 65; see also Mitchell 2007).

Certain features of the way the Olympics and Greek sports were practiced could be construed to reinforce this polarization between Greeks and barbarians as well as other tenets of Panhellenism. For

example, the nudity of Greek athletes was constructed as an ethnic boundary marker since public nudity was unthinkable for high-status males among neighboring ethnic groups such as the Lydians and Persians (Nielsen 2007: 22–8; for more on Greek athletic nudity, see Chapter 13, which includes an excursus on this subject). Moreover, certain proponents of Panhellenism addressed the huge crowds assembled at Olympia during the festival and lectured on Panhellenism in the ideological sense. The orator Gorgias gave a full-blown Panhellenist oration in 408, and 20 years later Lysias followed suit, attributing to Herakles a Panhellenist motive for founding the Olympics (namely that the festival would promote friendship among the Greeks) (Flower 2000: 92–3).

However, Olympia was never the site of any sort of institutions that might have helped turn the ideology of Panhellenism into reality. The authorities in charge of Olympia did not provide a forum for making decisions after or for acting on crusading speeches such as those of Gorgias and Lysias (Roy 2013). Panhellenist speeches at Olympia were expressions of purely personal points of view, and none of those speeches seem to have eventuated in action. Neither did the magistrates in charge of Olympia attempt to extend the “sacred truce” to cover the whole Greek world. The truce protected only the territory of Elis itself and travelers to the festival and thus resembled truces proclaimed not only for the protection of the three other festivals of the *periodos*, but also by many other city-states for the protection of lesser, local festivals. To mention just a few examples in the Peloponnese itself, “sacred truces” were proclaimed by the communities of Makiston (Strabo 8.3.13), Mantinea (Xenophon *Hellenika* 5.2.2), and Phleious (Xenophon *Hellenika* 4.2.16).

Furthermore, the Olympic authorities seem to have taken an inclusive rather than an exclusive view of who was a Greek, and there is no known instance of an athlete denied admission on account of his ethnic identity. In the fourth century, kings of Macedonia (Philip II, see Moretti 1957: nos. 434, 439, 445) and Molossia (Arrhybas, see Moretti 1957: no. 450) competed at Olympia;² both Macedonia and Molossia were located on the geographic fringes of the Greek homeland, and the Greek ethnicity of their inhabitants was at least occasionally questioned by residents of more centrally located communities such as Athens. In the Hellenistic period, citizens of newly founded Greco-Macedonian city-states competed (e.g., Apollonius of Alexandria in Egypt (Moretti 1957: no. 512)) as well as Greeks from recently Hellenized areas such as Syria (e.g., Asklepiades of Sidon (Moretti 1957: no. 724)). In later centuries, at least some Roman citizens competed (e.g., Gnaeus Marcius (Moretti 1957: nos. 743 and 745)). (For further discussion of Greek sport in Egypt after

the Macedonian conquest, see Chapter 23. For further discussion of Panhellenism at Olympia and Delphi, see Chapter 19.) Panhellenism thus operated within circumscribed boundaries at Olympia.

3 Olympia as an Extra-Urban Sanctuary of Elis

Large numbers of Greeks from many different communities frequented the sanctuary at Olympia. Precise numbers for the crowds that assembled to attend and participate in the Olympics are unavailable, but an audience of some forty-five thousand seems a reasonable estimate (Nielsen 2007: 55–7). However, the sanctuary was administered by a single city-state, Elis, situated some 60 kilometers to the north of Olympia by road (36 kilometers as the crow flies). The celebration of the Olympics was preceded by a procession from Elis to Olympia (Lee 2001: 28–9; Nielsen 2007: 47). Under normal circumstances, Elis alone controlled admission to the sanctuary and the competitions, it alone laid down the rules under which the competitions were conducted, and it appointed all the personnel of the sanctuary from among its own citizens.

Before each celebration of the Olympics, Elis sent sacred ambassadors on tours of the Greek world to announce the upcoming festival and proclaim the Olympic truce; in this way Elis itself actively promoted the international profile of the Olympics. The sacred ambassadors were styled *spondophoroi* (“truce bearers”) or *theoroi* (“sacred envoys”), and at least from the mid-fifth century they were assisted at their destinations by members of the local elite who had been appointed *theorodokoi* (“receivers of *theoroi*”) by Elis and served as links between the *theoroi* and the local political authorities. Since the evidence for this Olympic *epangelia* (“announcing”) by Elis is exiguous, the places definitely known to have been visited by Eleian *theoroi* are limited to Sparta, the region of Aitolia, and the island of Tenedos, but it may reasonably be assumed that practically all of the widespread Hellenic world was so visited (Perlman 2000: 63–6; Nielsen 2007: 39–40, 62–8).

The Olympic truce banned violence against travelers going to the Olympics and protected the territory of Elis against military aggression (Lämmer 1975/6 and 2010; Dillon 1995; Hornblower and Morgan 2007b: 30–3). Elis itself was the sole judge in determining whether a given city-state had respected it, as is clear from a famous incident in connection with the Olympics of 420. In that year, the

Eleians excluded Sparta from the Olympic festival and its citizens from the competitions because the Spartans, according to the Eleians, had broken the Olympic truce by sending a military force into the small city-state of Lepreon in order to assist it in a conflict against Elis. At the time of the Spartan expedition in support of Lepreon the truce had been proclaimed at Elis but not yet at Sparta. Even so, the Eleians held a hearing under Olympic law, and the case was conducted and heard by Eleians only. The Spartans were not even present at the hearing, at which they were fined the substantial sum of two *minai*³ for each soldier sent into Lepreon. When the Spartans refused to pay the fine, the Eleians excluded them from the Olympics, that is, “from the sacrifice and the competitions” (Thucydides 5.49.1–50.4, with Roy 1998 and Nielsen 2005: 67–74).

What an ancient athlete needed, accordingly, in order to “qualify” for the Olympics, was permission to participate from the Eleian magistrates, and this permission could be denied. In 420, when Elis had condemned Sparta for breaching the Olympic truce, a Spartan aristocrat named Lichas could not enter his team of horses under his own name, but he registered it as a collective entry of the Thebans (Nielsen 2007: 83 n. 293). An athlete, then, had to belong to a political community that had accepted and respected the Olympic truce in order to be allowed to compete in the Olympics.

There were other requirements that athletes had to meet (Crowther 2004: 23–33), and for each celebration of the Olympics Elis appointed a (new) board of *Hellanodikai* (“Judges of the Greeks”) whose duty it was, among other things, to enforce these requirements. Elis’s way of appointing the *Hellanodikai* must have been subject to change over time, but at least in the middle of the fourth century they were selected, perhaps by lot (Romano 2007: 98), one from each of the “tribes” or subdivisions of the Eleian citizen body (Roy 2006), in the same way that the Athenian *athlothetai*, who were responsible for the Panathenaic Games, were appointed ([Aristotle] *Constitution of the Athenians* 60.1). The *Hellanodikai*, clearly, were civic magistrates of the city-state of Elis despite their name, which may have been Elis’s way of highlighting the fact that the Olympics attracted competitors from all over the Greek world.⁴ Pausanias, writing in the second century CE, states that the *Hellanodikai* were appointed 10 months prior to the celebration of the Olympics and received instruction from the *nomophylakes* (“Guardians of the Laws”) of Elis, who educated them in the niceties of their duties (Pausanias 6.24.3; cf. Crowther 2004: 72; Sinn 2004: 89; Romano 2007: 100). There is no reason to believe that these arrangements were substantively different in the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

The *Hellanodikai* decided whether a given competitor would be

admitted to or excluded from participation in the Olympics. Athletes could be excluded on a number of grounds, such as if their city-state of origin had violated the sacred truce, if they could not produce evidence of Greek extraction, or if they were too young to compete (Nielsen 2007: 18–21). At the Olympics competitors were divided into two age-groups, “boys” and “men.” Such age-grouping was standard procedure in Greek athletics though not all festivals used the same groupings (see Chapter 14). At the Panathenaic Games, for example, there were three age-groups: “boys,” “beardless,” and “men.” At Olympia, competitors between the ages of 12 and 18 seem to have been classed as boys and those above 18 as men (Crowther 2004: 87–92).

Exactly how the *Hellandikai* decided whether an entrant should be admitted and to which age class is unknown but, in the case of boys, physical development seems to have been taken into account (Crowther 2004: 91–2). In addition, the *Hellandikai* may have interviewed the boys and their attendants, for they had to swear an oath that they would decide fairly, would not take bribes, and would not disclose information about individual athletes (Pausanias 5.24.10). This stipulation of confidentiality was probably designed “to preserve the integrity of the youth categories” (Perry 2007: 85), and it, or something like it, probably existed from an early period. In 468, the *Hellandikai* excluded Pherias of Aigina from the competitions as being too young (Pausanias 6.14.1; Pherias went on to win the boys’ wrestling at the Olympics of 464 (Moretti 1957: no. 255)). Also in the fifth century, Nikasylos of Rhodes was refused admittance to the boys’ wrestling and placed in the men’s class, which he won (Pausanias 6.14.2; Moretti 1957: no. 973). Such decisions by the *Hellandikai* seem to have been final, but on at least one occasion, outsiders attempted to bring some pressure to bear on the *Hellandikai* in order to influence their decisions. Xenophon relates that King Agesilaos of Sparta attempted to use his personal influence in order to have an Athenian boy, who was exceptionally big, admitted to the boys’ *stadion*, since the boy in question had a homoerotic relationship with someone closely connected to Agesilaos (*Hellenika* 4.1.40; cf. Plutarch *Agesilaos* 13.4 and Shipley 1997: 190–3).⁵

Other duties of the *Hellandikai* included the refereeing of the competitions and here again their decisions seem to have been final. They could fine athletes for breaking the rules and punish both athletes and spectators by flogging if they so wished (Crowther and Frass 1998). The Spartan Lichas, who, as already explained, was unable to enter his equestrian team under his own name in 420, entered it in the name of Thebes. When his chariot was victorious, he stepped into the arena in order to crown the charioteer “wishing to

make clear that the chariot belonged to him” (Thucydides 5.50.4). For this de facto violation of the official formalities of participation the Olympic authorities had him flogged and driven away (cf. Xenophon *Hellenika* 3.2.21).

Elis’s control of the sanctuary was visibly emphasized in other ways as well:

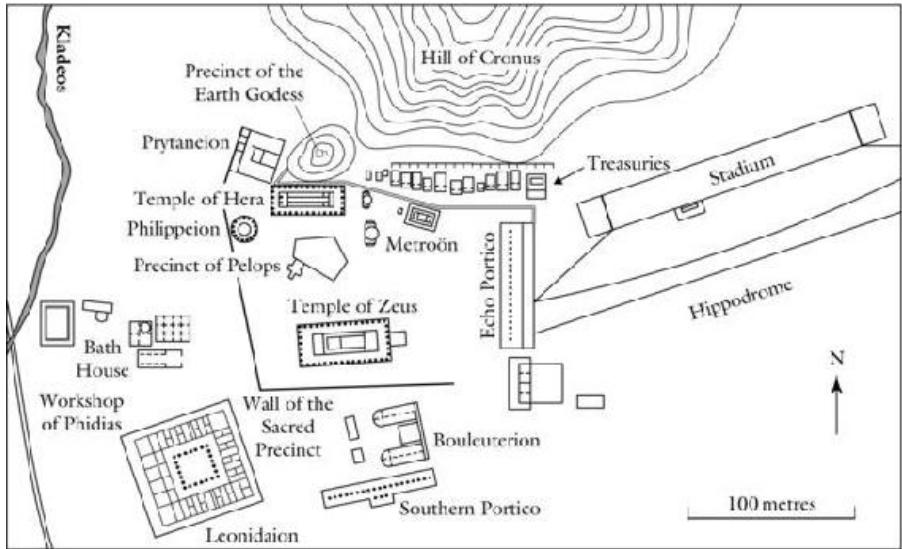
1 In the sixth century, Elis began to publish various acts of state as inscriptions at Olympia. These were all inscribed in a language that in itself was a demonstration of Elis’s control of the sanctuary. In the apt words of Colvin (2007): “The writers of Elis made an effort to capture unusual features of the [local] dialect, and since all of the early and important texts are public documents, this must represent a decision on the part of the epigraphic establishment to create a written standard which looked very different from other West Greek standards.” These documents related not only to the Olympics (e.g., Minon 2007: nos. 5, 7, 16) and the cult at the site (e.g., Minon 2007: nos. 3–4, 6, 8–9, 18), but also to the internal politics (e.g., Minon 2007: nos. 16–20, 30) and foreign relations (e.g., Minon 2007: nos. 10, 15–16, 22, 24, 27) of the city-state of Elis.

2 The *Hellanodikai* could fine athletes for, among other things, breaking the rules or attempting to bribe opponents. On occasion, the city-state of Elis would use the money so produced to erect sculptures of Zeus, the so-called *Zanes* (Eleian for “Zeuses”). These *Zanes* lined the route into the stadium. Twelve statues were erected in the fourth century and must have been conspicuous monuments to the power of the *Hellanodikai* and the city-state of Elis at Olympia. To drive the point home, the statues were accompanied by inscriptions, one of which stated that an oracle had approved the fine and another of which praised the piety of the Eleians (Pausanias 5.21.4–8; on the *Zanes*, see Herrmann 1974).

3 Most conspicuously, the Eleians built both a *prytaneion* and a *bouleuterion* at Olympia (see [Map 8.2](#)). Such buildings served the routine political administration of Greek city-states and were thus normally situated in the primary urban center of the state. The *prytaneion*, in particular, was an emphatic statement of the Eleian identity of Olympia. A *prytaneion* was the physical expression of the existence of a city-state, and on its hearth burned the eternal flame “which signified the life of the *polis*” (Miller 1978: 13; cf. Hansen and Fischer-Hansen 1994: 31). The significance of the location of this building at Olympia is clear and amounts to a statement of Elis’s ownership of the

sanctuary. According to Pausanias, the *prytaneion* was the place where the Eleians gave a banquet to the victors at the end of the Olympics; if this was so already in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, the building will have served throughout its history to impress upon the victors just how inseparable Elis and Olympia were (Nielsen 2007: 52–3).

Map 8.2 Plan of the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia and surrounding areas.



4 Tensions Arising from the Double Nature of Olympia

Olympia, then, was a Panhellenic sanctuary in the sense that it was visited by massive numbers of Greeks from all over the Greek world, while also serving as a key religious and political center for the city-state of Elis. It was perhaps inevitable that, as a result, conflicts of interest should arise. A (quite possibly fictional) anecdote in Herodotus (2.160) seems to reflect non-Eleian criticism of partiality in Elis's administration of the Olympics. The story goes that the Eleians in the early sixth century sent an embassy to Psammis II of Egypt (ruled 595–589) and challenged the wise Egyptians to suggest improvements in the fairness of their handling of the Olympics, all the while being convinced that this would be impossible. It has been plausibly suggested that this anecdote was originally an Eleian fabrication designed to justify the quality of Elis's administration of

the Olympics by having the universally recognized wisdom of the Egyptians endorse its fairness (Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella, *et al.* 2007: 360). Herodotus's retelling, however, reflects a later version of the story in which the message has been turned upside down. Upon hearing that citizens of Elis were allowed to compete in the Olympics, the Egyptians stated that this was a wholly unfair arrangement "since it was impossible not to favor a fellow citizen who entered the competitions, thereby committing wrong to a foreigner." It seems a reasonable assumption that the story as transmitted by Herodotus reflects Greek discontent with the predominant position of Elis in the running of the Olympics and is in fact a sarcastic remark on the title of the chief officials at the Olympics, "the Judges of the Greeks" (*Hellandikai*).⁶

In general, it seems that Eleian competitors in the Olympics won more than their due share of victories, Elis being the most successful city-state throughout Olympic history and conspicuously so in the boys' competitions and the equestrian events (Crowther 2004: 99–113). This, however, need not necessarily be the result of partiality on the part of the *Hellandikai*. Particularly in the boys' contests and the equestrian events, proximity to the contest site must have been a great asset, and it is noteworthy that in the highly prestigious events such as the men's *stadion* and the four-horse chariot race Eleians fared much less well.

One instance of what seems to be flagrant partiality on the part of the *Hellandikai* in favor of a compatriot, however, is recorded by Pausanias (6.3.7). At the Olympics of 396, two of the three *Hellandikai* officiating at the men's *stadion* declared Eupolemos of Elis the winner, while the third pronounced Leon of Ambracia the victor. Leon proceeded to lodge a complaint with the Olympic Council (*Olympike boule*), and the Council sentenced the two *Hellandikai* in question to a fine. However, their decision as to the outcome of the race was not overruled, and Eupolemos passed into history as victor in the men's *stadion* (Moretti 1957: no. 367). The decisions of the *Hellandikai*, then, seem to have been final, even when officially acknowledged to have been wrong.

On present evidence, however, the "scandal" of 396 is unique and though there are, as we have seen, various indications that the *Hellandikai* were on occasion criticized for partiality, they seem in general to have acted fairly and responsibly throughout Olympic history. Elis, moreover, was ready to alter rules that could reasonably be described as unfair. Thus, when Troilos of Elis won an equestrian victory in 372 while serving as one of the *Hellandikai*, it must have become clear that "to judge a fellow judge...tested even the most impartial officials" (Crowther 2004: 79). The Eleians then passed a

law to the effect that in the future no citizen acting as one of the *Hellaniotai* could enter horses for the equestrian competitions at the Olympics (Pausanias 6.1.5).

The best testimony to the overall quality of Eleian administration of the Olympics, however, comes from the Spartans. During the Peloponnesian War (431–404), the Spartans came to harbor several serious grudges against the Eleians, who had defected from the Peloponnesian League and allied themselves with Sparta's enemies, excluded the Spartans from the Olympics of 420, humiliated the Spartan aristocrat Lichas by having him flogged during these same Olympics, and debarred the Spartan king Agis from sacrificing at Olympia. All these acts were serious blemishes to Spartan prestige (Xenophon *Hellenika* 3.2.21–2). After their victory in the Peloponnesian War the Spartans decided to settle their score with Elis (Roy 2009b), a goal which they accomplished by invading Elis and forcibly breaking up the Eleians' local alliances by means of which the Eleians controlled a considerable amount of territory (on the local alliances of Elis, see Roy 2008 and 2009a). Among the conditions for peace that the Spartans contemplated, according to Xenophon (*Hellenika* 3.2.31), was that the Eleians be deprived of their administration of Olympia and hand it over to (unnamed) local rival claimants. However, the Spartans did not in fact abolish Eleian administration of Olympia. Since they had what must have seemed to them perfectly good reasons, why did they abstain? They did so, according to Xenophon, "because they considered the rival claimants to be rustics [*choritai*] and not capable of presiding over the sanctuary" (3.2.31). Evidently the Spartans did not find the rival claimants to be in possession of the administrative sophistication needed for such an important job, and so they resolved to leave Olympia in the hands of the experienced Eleians. In a situation, then, in which it could be reasonably expected that Elis would no longer deploy its administration of Olympia against Sparta, the Spartans found Eleian administration of the sanctuary to be preferable to what would in effect have been their own administration. The overall quality of Elis's administration of Olympia must, therefore, have been high.

The Eleians' impartiality did not, however, mean that Olympia was an apolitical environment. On the contrary, athletics at Olympia took place in what can only be described as a highly politicized context in which athletes were thought of as representing not only themselves, but also their city-states. Perceived offenses against individual athletes, accordingly, often ended up as the concern of their home states. The flogging of Lichas is a case in point and provided Sparta with a *casus belli* against Elis. Another example is provided by an affair

involving the Athenian pentathlete Kallippos. In 322, Kallippos was victorious at Olympia, but was fined by the *Hellanodikai* for bribing his opponents. The Athenian government intervened in the matter and sent the great orator Hypereides to Elis to have the fine lifted. When the Eleians refused to do so, the Athenians in their turn refused to pay and proceeded to boycott the Olympics for a period of perhaps as much as 20 years (Weiler 1991; Habicht 1997: 19–20).

Greek city-states took great interest in the performance of “their” athletes at Olympia and often celebrated their victories in extravagant ways. Thus, when Exainetos from the city of Akragas in Sicily returned home in 412 after his second victory in the *stadion*, he was escorted into the city by 300 chariots drawn by white horses (Diodorus Siculus 13.82.7; Nielsen 2007: 95). At Athens, Olympic victors received the right to dine daily in the *prytaneion*, probably the greatest honor the Athenian city-state had to bestow (*Inscriptiones Graecae* I³ 131; Nielsen 2007: 94–5). At Ephesos, victors in Panhellenic athletic contests were proclaimed in the *agora* (city center/marketplace) and received a cash payment (*Inscripfen von Ephesos* 1415); some city-states even set up sculptures of their victors in their *agora* (Lycurgus *Against Leokrates* 51).

In Olympia itself, the victors received not only a crown of leaves from the sacred olive tree, but also the right to erect a sculpture commemorating their victory (Raschke 1988b; Herrmann 1988; Lattimore 1988; Smith 2007). By Pausanias’s day, several hundred such statues stood at Olympia on inscribed bases that identified the athlete, his feats, and his home city, which shared in the glory created by the victories achieved by its athletes. At least by the Late Classical period city-states had begun to finance not only the commemorative victor monuments erected at home but on occasion also the monument erected at Olympia. Thus, in the 320s the city-state of Kolophon in Asia Minor celebrated an Olympic victory in wrestling by one of its citizens with a sculpture at Olympia as well as one in its own territory (Pausanias 6.17.4; *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 35.1125; Catling and Kavanou 2007 and 2008).

5 Conclusion

For a Greek athlete, there was no greater achievement than an Olympic victory (see, for example, Plato *Republic* 465d–e), and it seems reasonable to assume that an athlete’s primary personal motive for entering the Olympics will have been to achieve the immense glory created by victory at the most prestigious contest of all (Nielsen

forthcoming). Pindar opens his *Eighth Olympian* by stating that an Olympic victory brings “great and eternal glory indeed.” But what took place at Olympia was about much more than a relatively small group of athletes testing their relative talents. Olympia was a Panhellenic center of prime importance, while also functioning as an extra-urban sanctuary of the city-state of Elis. This created a highly politicized atmosphere rife with tensions, in spite of the Eleians’ generally competent and evenhanded management of the sanctuary. The sources of those tensions and how they were played out over the centuries provide invaluable insight into the Greeks’ devotion to sport, competition, and the city-state. Indeed, one might argue that the Olympics offer a unique illustration of the working of Greek city-state culture and that it is impossible to write the history of ancient Greece without paying close attention to the Olympics.

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Note also that Philip was allowed to erect at Olympia a monument, the Philippeion, to commemorate his victory at the Battle of Chaironeia in 338. On this monument, see Schultz 2007 and 2009.
- 3 Two *minai* equals 200 *drachmai*, one *drachma* being roughly a day’s pay for an average worker in the second half of the fifth century.
- 4 For other possible explanations of the title *Hellandikai*, see Siewert 1992: 115 and Nielsen 2007: 20–1.
- 5 On a similar note, it was claimed that Alcibiades of Athens was able to arrange certain matters to suit his personal purposes at Olympia in 416 owing to his influence with the *Hellandikai* ([Andocides] 4.26).
- 6 On Herodotus’s literary aims in presenting the story, see Dorati 1998.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

A classic introduction to the ancient Olympics is provided by Finley and Pleket 1976, which is, however, without references. The best modern introduction is Miller's reconstruction of the celebration of the festival in 300 BCE (2004: 113–28). Other introductions to the same material can be found in Young 2004 and Spivey 2004; for a more detailed study, see Sinn 2004. The basic discussion of the Olympic sacred truce can be found in Lämmer 2010.

A study of the Olympics and the sanctuary at Olympia as a focal point for the negotiation of the different layers of Greek identity is found in Nielsen 2007; Roy 2013 covers some of the same ground. A brief description the city-state of Elis as the host of the Olympics is found in Crowther 2003. Elis's exploitation of Olympia to further its own local power politics is discussed by Roy 1998 and Nielsen 2005. The general context in which the political aspects of the Olympics must be seen is set out in Hansen 2006.

CHAPTER 9

Sport and Society in Sparta

Paul Christesen

1 Introduction

In his history of the Persian Wars Herodotus recounts a story about the Persian king Xerxes sending a spy to observe the Greek forces stationed at Thermopylai. The Greeks know that they are about to be attacked, and in all likelihood killed, by a massive Persian army, yet the spy finds the Spartan soldiers on guard duty exercising in the nude and combing their hair. According to Herodotus (7.208), the Spartans' behavior baffled Xerxes. The Spartans, however, were simply following their normal routine, which included devoting a good deal of time to sport. Indeed, sport played a prominent role in Spartan life for centuries.

The goal of this chapter is to discuss not just what is known about Spartan sport, but also to give due consideration to the role of sport in Spartan society as a whole. As we will see, sport fostered cohesive social relations among Sparta's male citizens and in that way contributed meaningfully to maintaining the remarkable political stability that characterized Sparta for more than four hundred years.

The discussion that follows reflects both the nature of the sources at our disposal and the need for relative brevity. The sources for Spartan sport, which consist almost entirely of literary texts and inscriptions, come largely from the Classical (480–323 BCE) and Roman (31 BCE–476 CE) periods and tell us primarily about the activities of Spartan male citizens (Spartiates) and, to a lesser extent, of their unmarried daughters.¹ We know relatively little about Spartan sport in other periods or about the sports activities of members of other groups, such as slaves and married women, which made up the majority of the population of the Spartan state. By the Roman period

Sparta had become an unimportant place, but in the Classical period it was one of the most powerful states in the Greek world. We will, therefore, focus on the Classical period and on Spartiates. (For further discussion of the sports activities of Spartan females, see Chapter 16 of this volume.) It should also be noted that we will look carefully at choral dancing, which was an essential part of life in Sparta and which was in many ways very similar to sport, not least because it was an intensely physical activity that was frequently carried out on a competitive basis.

The single most important source for sport in Sparta in the Classical period is the Athenian soldier, philosopher, and author Xenophon (c.430–354). Xenophon served as an officer in a unit of mercenary soldiers that worked for the Spartans and was an admirer of their lifestyle. The years he spent fighting alongside Spartans and the friendships he developed with some of their leading men made it possible for him to write knowledgeably about Sparta. Xenophon's works include a short treatise, the *Lakedaimonion Politeia* (*Constitution of the Spartans*), that provides a reasonably good sense of Spartan sport in the first half of the fourth century and its relationship with the Spartan sociopolitical system. The information supplied by Xenophon can be usefully supplemented by the work of a number of authors who were active during the Classical period (including Aristophanes, Critias, Euripides, and Plato) and by inscriptions, found at Sparta and dating from the Classical period, that commemorate the achievements of individual athletes.

2 Spartan Sport in the Classical Period

In discussing sport in Sparta, we will begin by exploring how a boy from a Spartiate family would have been introduced to sport and how he might have pursued it as he got older. Spartan boys entered training to be citizens and soldiers at age 7 and in some sense continued in it for the rest of their lives. They were divided into three age groups: *paides* (from about 7 to about 14 years of age), *paidiskoi* (ages 14 to 20), and *hebontes* (ages 20 to 30). During their time as *paides*, boys from Spartiate families studied in small groups with private tutors hired by their families. They learned sports from a tutor called a *paidotribes* (plural *paidotribai*). Most of the events in which Spartan boys trained and competed were the same as those that were popular in other ancient Greek communities.² (On the specific sports

played by Greeks, see Chapter 1.)

Dance was another significant element in the physical training given to Spartan boys. Dancing was a regular and important part of life in ancient Greece, and Greeks showed a particular fondness for dancing in groups. A group of dancers was called a chorus and could include males and females of all ages in various combinations and in various numbers up to about fifty. Choral performances typically included singing and were accompanied by music from a small harp (the lyre) or a flute. The dancers in a boys' chorus were supervised by at least one adult, and one chorus member was usually selected as a lead dancer. Choral dances were performed both casually and more formally in connection with a wide variety of special occasions such as religious festivals. Spartiate boys regularly participated in choruses; the playwright Pratinas, writing about 500, characterized the Spartans as "eager for a chorus" (Fragment 4 Snell).³

One of the most important Spartan religious festivals, the Gymnopaidiai, featured competitive choral dancing. This festival commemorated Spartan military victories and seems to have been built around a multiday competition in which choruses of boys, youths, and men danced in the nude (the name of the festival means something like "nude dancing"). The festival was held in the heat of summer and was evidently an opportunity for Spartiates both to test their dancing skills against each other and to demonstrate their endurance in difficult conditions.⁴

A significant shift in a boy's existence occurred when he reached puberty and moved from the *paides* to the next age group, the *paidiskoi*. Boys' work with tutors seems to have ended at this point, and they began a tightly controlled apprenticeship that prepared them to be citizens and soldiers. Boys continued to play sports on a regular basis, but they now did so in a more overtly competitive way and were encouraged to put their strength, aggression, and leadership qualities on display. Indeed, Paul Cartledge has observed that "Spartan education at this second stage . . . resembled nothing so much as a paramilitary assault course" (2001: 86).

Once a boy became one of the *hebontes* his formal education was largely complete, but his involvement in sport did not diminish. Xenophon makes it clear that adult Spartiates were expected to exercise regularly:

Once Lycurgus⁵ realized that those who keep in training develop good skin, firm flesh, and good health from their food, whereas the lazy look bloated, ugly, and weak, he did not overlook this matter either. But although he saw that anyone who trained hard of his own free will appeared to give his body sufficient exercise,

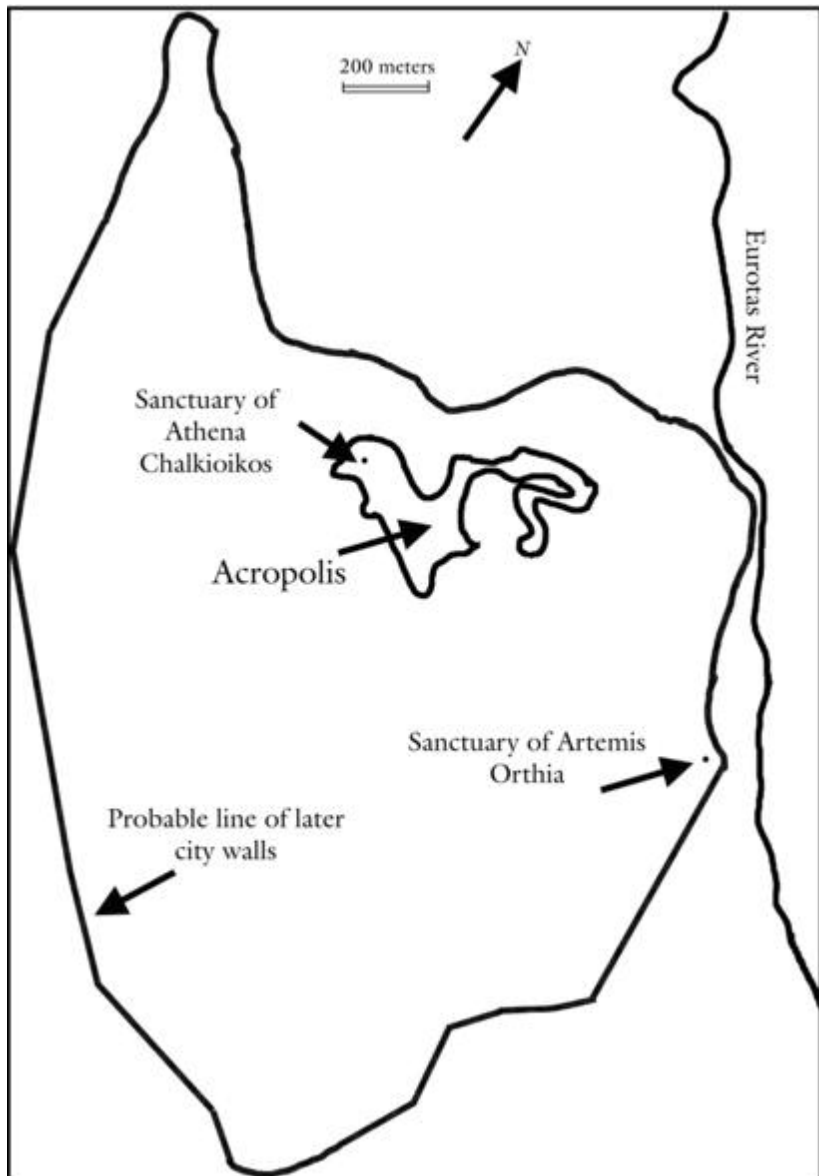
he ordered that in the *gymnasion* the oldest man present should take care of everything, so that they never exercised less than the food they consumed required. (*Lak. Pol.* 5.8–9)

When discussing the regulations of the Spartan army, Xenophon points out that all Spartiates “are ordered by law to take exercise while they are on campaign” and that they did so in the morning and evening prior to eating (*Lak. Pol.* 12.5–7).

Physical contests and trials were a major component of the Spartan educational system.⁶ At least some of those contests and trials were connected to transitions from one age group to the next. *Paidiskoi* who were about to become *hebontes* participated in a ritual in which they tried to steal cheese from an altar in the sanctuary of the goddess Artemis Orthia that was defended by *hebontes* with whips (*Lak. Pol.* 2.9).⁷ (See [Map 9.1](#) for a plan of ancient Sparta.) Ball games of various sorts were played informally all over ancient Greece; the Spartans were exceptional in having a formally organized and highly competitive ball game. This game, called *sphairomachia* (battle ball), was played in teams and seems to have been something like a combination of football, rugby, and volleyball. Xenophon makes it clear that adult male Spartiates played this game with some regularity during the Classical period (*Lak. Pol.* 9.5). In later periods, and possibly during the Classical period as well, *sphairomachia* contests formed part of age-group transition ceremonies.⁸

Spartan boys also took part in a contest held annually on a small island in a place in Sparta called Platanistas (the plane-tree grove). Two teams crossed bridges onto opposite sides of the island and then tried to drive each other into the water. The travel writer Pausanias, who visited Sparta in the second century CE, states that “in fighting they strike, and kick, and bite, and gouge out each other’s eyes. Thus they fight man against man. But they also charge in serried masses, and push each other into the water” (3.14.10, trans. F. Frazer). All the sources that refer to this contest come from the Roman period. However, a vague reference in Plato’s *Laws* (633b) to training in Sparta that involved “battles against each other using the hands” has been read by some scholars as an allusion to what took place at Platanistas and may indicate that this contest was also held during the Classical period.⁹

Map 9.1 Plan of ancient Sparta.



Spartiate boys and men who were talented and motivated athletes had a large number of opportunities to participate voluntarily in formally organized athletic competitions that had no connection to the Spartan educational system. The Karneia festival, one of the most important events in the Spartan religious calendar, included athletic contests from an early date (Kennell 1995: 64–6; Miller 2004: 146–9). We know about other, less prominent competitions held within the borders of the Spartan state primarily through dedications made by victors in athletic contests. Those dedications usually took the form of inscribed stone slabs that listed all of an athlete's victories. One of the

most informative of these dedications was erected at the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos in the center of Sparta sometime around 430. It commemorates the successes of a man named Damonon and his son Enymakratidas in no less than nine different athletic competitions held in and around Sparta. The very best Spartan athletes and horses went on to compete at the highest possible level, the Olympic Games.¹⁰

Success in athletics brought symbolic but substantial honors in Sparta. A few, extravagantly successful Spartan Olympic victors – Hipposthenes, Hetoimokles, Chionis (and possibly others) – literally became objects of worship (see Chapter 20). Less spectacular rewards awaited other Spartan athletes who triumphed at Olympia. Spartans, unlike many Greek communities, did not give their Olympic victors large cash bonuses, but rather the right to fight next to Sparta's kings in battle. Victories in less high profile contests than the Olympics also brought Spartan athletes respect, and victorious athletes erected many monuments trumpeting their prowess in and around Sparta. A considerable fraction of these monuments take the form of inscribed stone slabs, the most well-known example of which is that set up by Damonon. Other, functionally similar pieces include bronze figurines of athletes, weights used in the long jump, a bronze discus, and a life-size relief sculpture of a discus thrower.¹¹

3 Sport and Society in Sparta in the Classical Period:

Introduction

Sparta, under the leadership of the Spartiates, was for centuries a paragon of political stability. From the middle of the seventh to the end of the third century, the Spartiates had a stranglehold on the governance of the Spartan state. During that period there were significant social, economic, and political strains in Sparta, but no revolutionary changes in the political system. This set Sparta apart from most other Greek communities, which tended to suffer from noteworthy political disturbances with some frequency.

The Spartiates in fact showed a remarkable ability to hold on to power in the face of significant external and internal challenges to their rule. Sparta had potent external enemies, and Spartiates were a small, deeply resented minority in their own state, much of the populace of which was disenfranchised or enslaved. Xenophon, in recounting a failed conspiracy against the Spartiates, reports that the

conspiracy's leader claimed that most of Sparta's residents were unable "to conceal the fact that they would be glad to eat the Spartiates even raw" (*Hellenika* 3.3.6). To make matters worse, there were significant tensions among the Spartiates themselves. Notionally all Spartiates were equal; indeed they called each other *homoioi* (peers). However, there were in practice deep and lasting inequalities among Spartiates. Fiercely contested meritocratic competition was a key element in the Spartan sociopolitical system. Spartiates who distinguished themselves in athletic competitions, on the battlefield, and in their service to the state were rewarded with elevated social standing, something which was by no means always gracefully accepted by their less successful peers (see, for example, Xenophon *Lak. Pol.* 4.1–6). Moreover, the members of a small number of Spartan families enjoyed special social and political privileges that were passed down from one generation to the next. The result was that Spartiates were riven by powerful and enduring resentments and divisions that could easily have torn them apart.

Yet the Spartiates held on to power for centuries and made Sparta into one of the most powerful states in the Greek world. One of the primary reasons that the Spartiates managed to remain on top of a steep and unstable sociopolitical pyramid was that they maintained a high degree of internal cohesion. That was significant because one of the more important causes of political disturbances in ancient Greece was conflict within the citizen body, something which Spartiates managed to avoid. Indeed, the Spartiates were sufficiently unified for over four centuries that they remained consistently capable of taking collective action to defend their interests as a group.

The reasons for the Spartiates' cohesion have been the subject of much discussion. Ancient Greeks tended to believe that that cohesion was the almost inevitable result of a shared education and lifestyle by means of which Spartiates were "trained . . . to have neither the wish nor the ability to live for themselves; but like bees they were to make themselves always integral parts of the whole community" (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 25.3, trans. B. Perrin). Modern scholars have typically focused instead on institutions, activities, and practices such as religious rites, dining groups, homoeroticism, and habits of dressing and speaking. These are seen as important factors in strengthening relationships between Spartiates and in weakening familial ties that might otherwise have diluted Spartiates' loyalties to each other (see Cartledge 2001: 91–105; David 1992, 1999; Flower 2009; Powell 2001: 225–31). Another factor of particular importance was the Spartiates' habit of regularly playing sports and dancing together.

In order to understand how sport and dancing shaped the Spartiates' relationships with each other, it is helpful to make use of

concepts and theories borrowed from sociology, specifically those concepts and theories that speak to the origins of social order. (Social order can be defined as the manner in which a society is organized and the social norms, values, and related institutions and practices required to maintain that organization.) There are three basic sources of social order: socialization, coercion, and consensus. Teaching children social norms virtually from birth, that is, socialization, goes a long way toward making those norms second nature to the point where people adhere to them literally without thinking about it. Coercion can range from the brutal to the subtle. It can take the form of pressure, threats, intimidation, or outright force, or it can be a gradual indoctrination in the habit of obeying rules and authority figures. Consensus occurs when the members of a society come to broad agreement about norms they will voluntarily obey. Two of the more important ways of building consensus are large gatherings and clearly defined ideals. Bringing together as many of a group's members as possible helps individuals develop a sense of themselves as part of a unified entity with shared norms. That in turn offers strong encouragement for individuals to prioritize the pursuit of those norms. Clearly defined ideals, even if they are not always lived up to, offer shared reference points that channel individuals' behavior in specific directions.

Socialization, coercion, and consensus acting together create a situation in which the individuals in a group achieve a relatively high degree of cohesiveness both because they share a set of norms and values that shape their behavior and because they are coerced into adhering to those norms and values. This holds true for societies as a whole, and for smaller groups, such as the Spartiates.

Regularly playing sports and dancing in choruses helped produce a cohesive citizen body in Sparta because they (1) socialized young Spartiates, (2) imposed disciplined behavior via coercion, and (3) helped create consensus. In addition, the specific norms and values Spartiates shared and were coerced into adhering to promoted unity. Those norms and values privileged physical prowess and toughness, service to the Spartan state as a soldier and citizen, and a collectivist ethos according to which individuals were expected to cooperate eagerly with other Spartiates in the interests of the good of the group as a whole.

4 Sport and Society in Sparta in

the Classical Period:

Socialization and Coercion

Sport and choral dancing socialized Spartiates in a variety of different ways. These activities taught what were for Spartiates norms of great importance by regularly putting them into highly competitive environments that required the subordination of the individual to the group and the demonstration of physical prowess and toughness. This was not lost on Xenophon, who wrote, “Seeing that the choruses most worth hearing and the sports contests most worth watching were those in which the competitive spirit among the participants was most intense, Lycurgus thought that if he could bring the *hebontes* together in competitions that tested excellence, they too would attain the highest degree of manly excellence thereby” (*Lak. Pol.* 4.2).

Furthermore, Spartiates were unusual compared to other ancient Greek communities in regularly playing a competitive team sport, the rough-and-tumble ball game *sphairomachia*. Sports played competitively in teams almost inevitably teach the importance of subordinating individual interests to those of the group. The same ethos was also taught by means of choral dancing, which entailed all the members of a chorus moving together in perfect unity. Moreover, the songs that Spartiates sang while dancing were overtly intended to inculcate specific norms and values. Claude Calame observes that “by reciting the poems composed by their masters the poets, the chorus-members learn and internalize a series of myths and rules of behavior represented by the material taught” (1997: 231).¹² A passage from one of Sparta’s most beloved poets, Tyrtaeus, gives a sense of the kind of songs Spartans favored: “It is noble for a man who is good and brave to perish among the front ranks, fighting for his fatherland . . . Let us then eagerly fight for this land and let us die for the sake of our children, never sparing others. So, young men, stand by each other and fight. Do not begin shameful flight nor give way to fear” (Fragment 10, ll. 1–16 West, trans. P. Christesen). Spartan males spent hundreds of hours dancing in choruses while singing songs like this one, with predictable effects.

The adherence of Spartiates to expected norms and values was further reinforced by sport and choral dancing because these activities subtly coerced them into the habit of obeying rules and authority figures. In the past thirty years, thanks in no small part to the work of the French scholars Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, social scientists have become much more aware of the extent to which societies are held together by means of subtle forms of coercion. Foucault called this type of coercion “discipline” and labeled its

operation as the “micro-physics of power.” He described individuals who have been taught discipline as “the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is continually exercised around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him” (1977: 128–9).

Bourdieu worked along the same lines as Foucault, and his scholarship can be more easily applied to the study of sport. Foucault saw discipline as something that was imposed on a person’s mind largely through the functioning of institutions such as schools and prisons. Bourdieu, on the other hand, took the position that discipline could be taught by means of bodily training. He argued that rule-governed physical activity was “a way of obtaining from the body a form of consent that the mind could refuse” and that “bodily discipline is the instrument par excellence of all forms of ‘domestication’” (1988: 161). Perhaps the most obvious example is teaching soldiers to march in precise formation. It is critical that on the battlefield the soldiers in an infantry unit think and function as a member of a group and obey orders promptly, even at the cost of endangering their own lives. These habits must, however, be learned before soldiers enter battle. From Bourdieu’s perspective this is where marching comes in. Drilling a soldier in marching in formation compels him or her to function not as an individual but as part of a group and to comply immediately with commands. Hundreds of hours of marching in formation makes certain ways of thinking and acting second nature and thereby inculcates habits that are vital on the battlefield.¹³

Spartiates were subtly coerced into obedience by means of physical discipline imposed through choral dancing and sport. The members of a chorus were habituated into obeying authority figures in the form of one or more chorus leaders. More importantly, precise movement as part of a closely coordinated chorus had much the same effect as habitual marching does on modern-day soldiers: it compelled Spartiates to subordinate themselves to a larger unit. This subject attracted Xenophon’s attention, in a fictitious dialogue between a man and his wife, the *Oeconomicus*. The husband urges his wife to run the household in a highly organized fashion:

My dear, there is nothing so convenient or so good for human beings as order. Thus, a chorus is a combination of human beings; but when the members of it do as they choose, it becomes mere confusion, and there is no pleasure in watching it; but when they act and chant in an orderly fashion, then those same men at once seem worth seeing and worth hearing. Again, my dear, an army in disorder is a confused mass, an easy prey to enemies, a

disgusting sight to friends and utterly useless . . . But an army in orderly array is a noble sight to friends, and an unwelcome spectacle to the enemy. What friend would not rejoice as he watches a strong body of troopers marching in order, would not admire cavalry riding in squadrons? And what enemy would not fear troopers, horsemen, light-armed, archers, slingers disposed in serried ranks and following their officers in orderly fashion? Nay, even on the march where order is kept, though they number tens of thousands, all move steadily forward as one man; for the line behind is continually filling up the gap. (8.3–7, trans. E. Marchant)

It is not coincidental that Xenophon draws a direct link between an orderly chorus and an orderly army.

Playing sports required that Spartiates learn and obey rules that were enforced by authority figures through corporal punishment and thereby inculcated a habit of obedience. *Paidotribai* taught Spartan boys formal rules for sports as part of their education. That was in part a matter of socialization, but it also involved a considerable degree of coercion because infractions were met with immediate punishment in the form of flogging. Both boys and men participating in formally organized athletic competitions were flogged or fined for rule violations. It was not unusual for boys to experience corporal punishment, but free adult male citizens in Greek communities were normally immune from that sort of treatment. Flogging was in fact typically a punishment reserved for slaves (Crowther 2004: 141–60). Its use against free men who broke the rules in athletic competitions highlights the strong coercive element in sport.

Sport and choral dancing thus helped produce a Spartan citizen body that was unusually cohesive because these activities inculcated norms that prioritized the interests of the group over those of the individual, taught Spartiates to think and act as members of a collectivity, and helped made them readily obedient to rules and authority figures.

5 Sport and Society in Sparta in the Classical Period: Consensus

Spartiates achieved consensus in no small part because of widespread participation in and spectatorship of sport and choral dancing. There are three relevant considerations. First, events such as the Gymnopaïdiai and the Karneia attracted large crowds of Sparta's

residents and helped them develop a sense of a shared, communal identity. The act of coming together in the same place and time gave people the feeling of belonging to a single group. In addition, contests in sport and dance put on display and offered rewards for demonstrating qualities that were privileged in Sparta, including the ability to perform effectively as a member of a group. The sport sociologist John Hargreaves has observed that sporting events “can . . . constitute regular public occasions for discourse on some of the basic themes of social life – success and failure, good and bad behavior, ambition and achievement, discipline and effort and so on” (1986: 12).

Second, playing sports and dancing together from an early age and on an almost daily basis promoted consensus by forging a bond among Spartiates. The ball game *sphairomachia* and competitive choral dancing, which were both in effect team sports, were particularly significant in building camaraderie.

Third, the habit of playing sports in the nude heightened the bonding and thus the consensus-building effects of sport. Public nudity was rare in ancient Greece. Some form of undressing took place as part of using public baths, but even then Greeks preferred to use individual tubs rather than the large communal pools favored by Romans. The one major, early exception to the general rule that Greeks preferred to remain clothed when in public was that boys and girls going through coming-of-age rites sometimes went nude. When Spartiates stripped for exercise they were doing something that was associated with religious rituals but that was not otherwise part of everyday life. A Spartiate exercising in the nude was, therefore, doing something that was quite unusual and that gave him a vaguely sacred aura while differentiating him from other members of Spartan society. That, in turn, helped promote the sense of belonging to a specific, special group. (For further discussion, see Chapter 13, which includes an excursus on athletic nudity.)

To sum up, there is good reason to think that there was a causal connection between the deep dedication Spartiates showed to playing sports and dancing together and the unusual stability of the Spartan state. Sport and dancing helped produce a cohesive citizen body because they socialized young Spartiates, imposed disciplined behavior via coercion, and helped create consensus. They also inculcated norms and values that promoted unity by emphasizing service to the state, physical toughness, and subordinating individual interests to those of the group.

6 Conclusion

To be a Spartiate was to be an athlete and a dancer. Sport and choral dancing were two of the basic activities around which the lives of Spartiates of all ages were constructed and which helped bind them together as a group. This is apparent in the way Spartiates spent their time, and also in the way Spartiates who failed in their duties were treated. Xenophon notes that:

Lycurgus made it clear that happiness was the reward of the brave, misery the reward of cowards. For whenever someone proves a coward in other cities, he has only the bad reputation of being a coward, but the coward goes to the same public places as the brave and takes his seat and joins in physical exercise, as he likes. But in Sparta everyone would be ashamed to accept a coward as a messmate or as an opponent in a wrestling match. Frequently such a man is not picked when they select teams for ball games, and in choruses he is relegated to the most ignominious positions. (*Lak. Pol.* 9.3–5)

A Spartiate who was a coward had violated an essential norm. This violation was punished by exclusion from the community of Spartiates and that exclusion took the form of being left out of communal dining, wrestling, and ball games and being put in the least honorable spots in choruses. The use of sport and choral dancing to punish cowards shows just how important these activities were to the identity of Spartiates.

ABBREVIATIONS

Lak. Pol. = *Lakedaimonion Politeia*

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Spartiates seem to have generally avoided competing in two events, boxing and *pankration*, for reasons that are not entirely clear (see the discussion in Christesen forthcoming; Crowther 2004: 115–19; Hodkinson 1999: 157–60).
- 3 Spartans also did at least some individual dancing, some of it competitive. One dance in particular, *bibasis*, was strongly associated with Sparta. It involved jumping up and touching the buttocks with the heels (Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 81–2; Pollux 4.102).
- 4 The sources on the Gymnopaediai present numerous interpretive

difficulties (see Ducat 2006: 265–74; Pettersson 1992: 42–56; and Richer 2005).

5 Many ancient writers, including Xenophon, subscribed to the almost certainly erroneous belief that the entire Spartan sociopolitical system was constructed at an early date by a lawgiver named Lycurgus and remained largely unchanged for centuries thereafter. All translations from Xenophon's *Lakedaimonion Politeia* are taken from Lipka 2002, in some cases with small changes to make the sense of the original Greek more obvious.

6 The origins of these contests and trials have been the subject of much debate. Some scholars have seen them as remnants of primeval coming-of-age rites, others as consciously created parts of the Spartan educational system. See Ducat 2006: 179–222.

7 This rite evolved significantly over the course of time, and by the Roman period had become a bloody spectator sport (see Ducat 2006: 249–60 and Kennell 1995: 126–9). Spartan males throughout Sparta's history seem to have exercised regularly at a place called the *dromos* ("the racecourse"), which the travel writer Pausanias visited and described in the second century CE (3.14.6). This was a large, open area that in Pausanias's time held two separate *gymnasia*. At least some formally organized races held during the Classical period may have taken place in a street leading out of Sparta's *agora* (marketplace). Other sites, including the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia and Sparta's theater, were used for special sports events, particularly those linked to transitions from one age group to the next. On the location of the *dromos* in Sparta, see Sanders 2009.

8 The players in *sphairomachia* were called *sphaireis*. The evidence for ball playing in ancient Greece is discussed in Crowther 2004: 351–73; Harris 1972: 75–111; and O'Sullivan 2012. On ball games in Sparta, see also Kennell 1995: 38–43, 59–63, 110–11, 131.

9 On the Platanistas contests, see Ducat 2006: xv, 27, 57, 208–9 and Kennell 1995: 25, 45, 55–9, 111, 138. Boys' contests centering on dancing and singing, with prizes of iron sickles for the winners, were held in Sparta in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia during the Classical period. Most of our information about these contests comes from the Roman period, and very little is known about what they might have looked like earlier. See Kennell 1995: 28–9, 49–69, 115–42.

10 See Hodkinson 2000: 303–7 for a translation and discussion of the Damonon inscription. Spartan athletes were a dominating presence at Olympia in the seventh and sixth centuries and Spartan horses won with great frequency at Olympia in the fifth century. In

other periods, Spartans were notably less successful. For discussion of the reasons why, see Christesen forthcoming. During the Classical period Spartans do not seem to have competed regularly in gymnastic contests outside of Sparta other than the Olympics; they did, however, compete in hippic contests outside of Sparta, including those held as part of the Panathenaic Games in Athens.

11 On the rewards for athletic success and means of commemoration of athletic victories at Sparta, see Hodkinson 1999: 152–7 and 165–76.

12 In this quote Calame is discussing choruses of Spartan girls, but his observation holds true for male choruses as well.

13 On this subject, the field manual issued by the United States Army under the title *Drill and Ceremony* is particularly informative (Department of the Army 2003).

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For a good, highly accessible introduction to Spartan history, see either Cartledge 2002b or Kennell 2010. For more scholarly accounts, see Cartledge 2002a; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002; and the articles in Powell (forthcoming). For an introduction to, English translation of, and commentary on Xenophon's *Lakedaimonion Politeia*, see Lipka 2002. Detailed treatments of the basic facts about sport in ancient Sparta can be found in Christesen (forthcoming). On the sociopolitical aspects of Spartan sport, see Christesen 2012. Stephen Hodgkinson has written seminal pieces on athletic competition in Sparta (other than horse racing, (1999)) and on horse racing in Sparta (2000: 303–33). The Spartan educational system, which included a great deal of sports activity, is ably treated in Ducat 2006 and Kennell 1995. The initiatory aspects of Spartan sport are highlighted in Scanlon 2002: 121–37. There is at present no single, thorough, up-to-date treatment in English of dance in ancient Greece. The relationship between dance and education is discussed in Griffith 2001. A more wide-ranging examination of dance in ancient Greece can be found in a series of books in French by Marie-Hélène Delavaud-Roux (1993, 1994, 1995). An excellent brief introduction to past and current thinking about the bases of social order can be found in Cohen 1968: 18–33. For a more up-to-date and scholarly work on the same subject, see Wrong 1994. For a collection of important pieces of scholarship on social order, see Hechter and Horne 2009.

CHAPTER 10

Sport, Society, and Politics in Athens

Donald G. Kyle

1 Introduction

According to Thucydides, in the winter of 431/0,¹ early in the Peloponnesian War, Pericles delivered a famous speech in which he praised Athens for, among many other things, the recreations it offered its citizens. He described those recreations as the “various contests [*agones*] and sacrifices spread throughout the year” and lauded their capacity to refresh the Athenians’ spirits (Thucydides 2.38.1). In 380 the orator and educator Isocrates wrote another speech of the same type. He praised Athens for its tradition of great festal assemblies; its numerous sporting and artistic entertainments, with enthusiastic competitors and multitudes of spectators from all over the Greek world; and its varied contests that rewarded speed, strength, eloquence, wisdom, and other talents. For such contests Athens gave the “greatest prizes [*athla megista*],” and, while festivals elsewhere in Greece took place at long intervals and were soon over, Athens held festal assemblies throughout every year (*Panegyricus* 43–6). Although rhetorical, these passages properly highlight the prominence and variety of sport and spectacle in Athens.

This essay on sport in Athens in the Archaic (700–480) and Classical (480–323) periods has three major parts. The first part surveys the phenomenon of Athenian sport, especially in the Panathenaic (“all-Athenian”) Games. The second part contextualizes Athens within a broader debate on the social history (the social origins, status, and social mobility) of Greek athletes. The third part offers an extended discussion of the sociopolitical dimensions of

Athenian sport history. The sources for Athens are significantly more abundant than for any other ancient Greek community, and, as a result, Athens provides our best opportunity to examine the role and influence of sport in the sociopolitical history of a Greek city-state.

Overall, by focusing on Athens, I hope to contribute to ongoing discussions about whether sport remained elitist or became more broadly accessible over time, and whether sport in Greek city-states intensified or mitigated sociopolitical tensions. I suggest that socioeconomic changes did make Athenian athletic participation somewhat more accessible, although family finances remained a crucial factor, and that, despite tensions, sport in Athens was a positive, popular, and vital element in civic life.

2 Sport in Archaic Athens: Precursors and the Great Panathenaia

The earliest evidence for Athenian athletics comes from scenes of boxers and chariots on pottery from the eighth century. During that period Athenian elites probably participated in local, privately organized funeral games that offered material prizes and local cult festivals that included footraces (see Chapter 3 in this volume). By the seventh century Athenians turn up as Olympic victors (Kyle 1987: 20), and in the sixth century Athens began to reward its athletes for victories at Panhellenic contests.

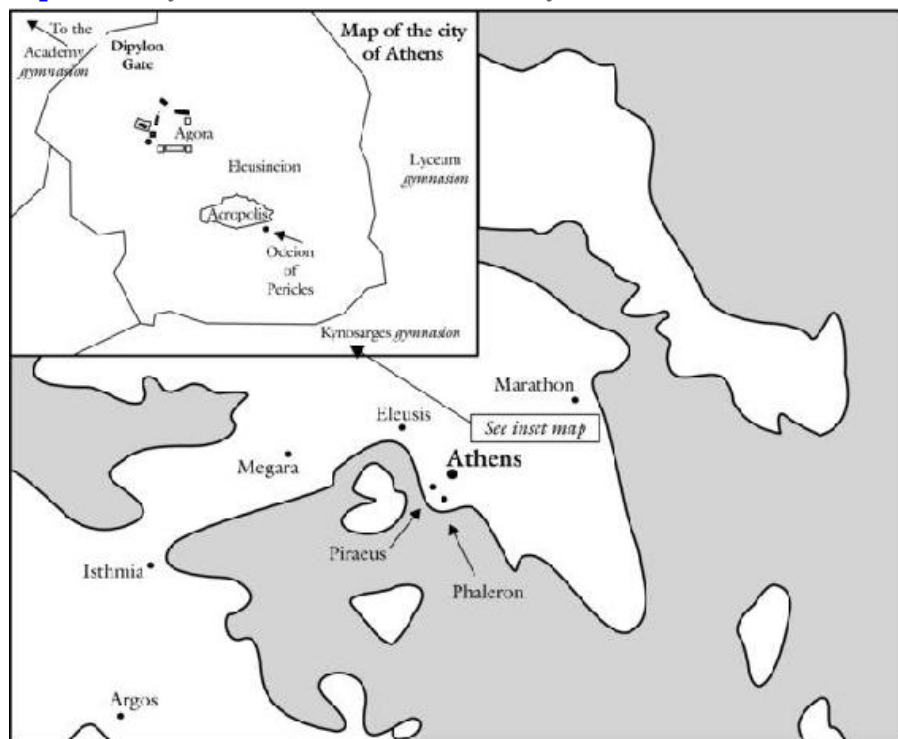
In 566/5 Athens expanded an earlier festival to Athena into what became its grandest festival, the Panathenaia. This festival was held annually, and was timed to coincide with and celebrate the start of the year, which in Athens began in July. The Panathenaia was celebrated with special magnificence every fourth year, so that there were two different versions of the Panathenaia, the Greater and the Lesser. Inscriptions dating to c.560 from the Acropolis that mention a *dromos* (a racecourse or a race) and an *agon* (a contest) administered by a board of civic officials (*hieropoioi*) probably refer to the Panathenaic Games (Raubitschek 1949: nos. 326–8).

Lasting several days, the Greater Panathenaia included a religious procession through the city and up to the Acropolis, a sacrifice of 100 cattle and distribution of the meat for feasting, the presentation of a special robe (*peplos*) to the cult statue of the goddess Athena, and a varied program of contests. (See [Map 10.1](#) for the locations of key

sites mentioned in this essay.) The Lesser Panathenaia featured a procession and some contests (Shear 2003a: 171–2; Tracy 2007), but the contests at the Greater Panathenaia (usually called the Panathenaic Games in modern scholarship), became Athens’s sporting showplace for the wider Greek world and the most prominent of the many “local” or “civic” athletic festivals (i.e., athletic festivals held in or near a city, with extensive official state involvement) organized by various Greek communities.²

Victors at the Panathenaic Games received prizes that declared and advertised Athens’s wealth and honored its patron goddess. In the 560 s Athens began offering prizes of sacred olive oil in distinctively shaped and decorated “Panathenaic prize amphorae.” These vases were decorated with an armed Athena on the front and athletic scenes on the back. The front also bore an official prize inscription: “One of the prizes from Athens” (*ton Athenethen athlon*) (see Chapter 5 for more on Panathenaic amphorae). Neither stingy nor shy, Athens handed out at least 1,400 and probably over 2,000 Panathenaic amphorae as prizes each time the Panathenaic Games were held. Each amphora contained about 10 gallons of olive oil. In myth, Athena had given Athens the gift of an olive tree, and olive oil was one of Athens’s most famous exports.

Map 10.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



Elaborate games with valuable prizes were an investment in marketing and an inducement for visitors. The poet Pindar, in an ode for a Panathenaic victor from Argos, mentions prizes of oil in painted vessels (*Nemean* 10.33–7). Non-Athenian victors transported amphorae widely, from Italy to the Black Sea, broadcasting Athens’s fame as a grand and divinely favored community.

2.1 The Panathenaic program and prizes around 380

Scholars have attempted to reconstruct the development of the program of events at the Panathenaic Games in the sixth and fifth centuries, using literary references and depictions on Panathenaic amphorae. The program, apparently already quite extensive in the sixth century, changed and expanded over time. Athens borrowed elements from Olympia and probably Delphi (Neils 2007), but it did not merely copy existing contests elsewhere in Greece.³

Fragments of an inscribed prize list (*Inscriptiones Graecae* II² 2311) from the year 380 provide invaluable evidence for the program of events, which included team as well as individual contests in multiple age classes as well as prizes for second place. Some special events were for Athenians only, but musical events and many Olympic-style gymnastic contests (*gymnikoi agones*) and hippic contests (*hippikoi agones*) were open to all Greeks. (For basic information about gymnastic and hippic competitions at Greek athletic contests, see Chapter 1.) The information contained in this inscription about the events that were held and the prizes on offer for each event is summarized in tabular form here (based on the reconstruction in Shear 2003b, which should also be consulted on the date of the inscription). In the interests of clarity, that information is broken up into five separate tables, with each table pertaining to specific sections of the inscription and reflecting section headings found in the original text. The inscription is damaged, as a result of which there are numerous gaps in those tables.

Table 10.1 List of gymnastic contests at the Panathenaic Games.

Event	First place	Second place
Number of amphorae awarded		
Boys		
<i>Dolichos</i>	30	6
<i>Stadion</i>	50	10
Pentathlon	30	6
Wrestling	30	6
Boxing	30	6
<i>Pankration</i>	40	8

Youths		
<i>Stadion</i>	60	12
Pentathlon	40	8
Wrestling	40	8
Boxing	40	8
<i>Pankration</i>	50	10
Men		
<i>Dolichos</i>	60	12
<i>Stadion</i>	80	16
<i>Diaulos</i>	60	12
Pentathlon	?	?
Wrestling	?	?
Boxing	?	?
<i>Pankration</i>	70	14
<i>Hoplitodromos</i>	70	14

After gold and silver crowns for musical victors, the inscription lists numbers of amphorae of oil awarded as first and second prizes (at a 5 : 1 ratio) in the gymnic events, which were open to Athenians and non-Athenians alike, for three age categories (boys, youths, men) (see [Table 10.1](#)).

Next come hippic events, starting with the intriguing *apobates* race, open only to Athenian citizens, with an uncertain numbers of jars of oil for first and second prizes (see [Table 10.2](#)). Strongly associated with Athena and held on the Panathenaic Way in the marketplace (the *agora*), this spectacular chariot race involved soldiers in armor dismounting and (probably) remounting speeding chariots (Schultz 2007) (see [Figure 10.1](#)). Perhaps evoking epic warfare, in which Homeric heroes descended from chariots to fight at Troy, the event is immortalized in the sculptured frieze on the Parthenon (Neils 2001: 138–41; Neils and Schultz 2012). The following entries in the list pertain to hippic contests open to all, with relatively rich prizes on offer. Whereas the victor in the men’s *stadion* (a sprint down the track) received 80 vases, victory in the *zeugos* (a race with a pair of equids yoked to a cart or sulky) for adult horses brought 140 amphorae. Numbers for the prestigious four-horse chariot races must have been larger still.

Table 10.2 List of hippic contests at the Panathenaic Games.

<i>Hippic contests open only to Athenian citizens</i>	<i>First place</i>	<i>Second place</i>
	<i>Number of amphorae awarded</i>	
<i>Apobates</i>	?	?
<i>Hippic contests open to all</i>	<i>First place</i>	<i>Second place</i>
<i>Number of amphorae awarded</i>		
Horse race	?	?
Four-colt chariot race	?	?
Four-horse chariot race	?	?
Two-colt chariot race	?	?
Two-horse chariot race	?	?
Colt <i>zeugos</i>	40	8

Specified as reserved “for warriors” and probably reflecting Athens’s increased use of cavalry in recent decades, the next listings are four special events open only to Athenian cavalymen, with prizes for first and second place: horse race, *zeugos* with horses, the processional *zeugos* (the details of which remain mysterious), and the javelin throw from horseback (see [Table 10.3](#)).

Listed next, with oxen as prizes, are four events that were closed to non-Athenians, the contestants consisting of teams entered by each of the 10 tribes into which Athenian citizenry was divided (see [Table 10.4](#)).⁴ First comes pyrrhic dance, which in myth was invented by Athena to celebrate the defeat of the Giants. Groups of dancers, known as choruses (one chorus from each tribe in each of three different age classes and hence 30 choruses in total), equipped with shields, helmets, and spears, imitated defensive and offensive movements (Plato *Laws* 815a).⁵ *Euandria*, the contest in “manly excellence,” revolved around the display of size, strength, and training (Crowther 2004: 330–9; Neils 1994: 154–9). The handsome and fit winners were the first carriers of sacred objects in the Panathenaic procession. Torch races, popular spectacles combining ritual and athletics, took place as part of the Panathenaia and various other festivals (Bentz 2007). The Panathenaic event was a relay race in which the winning team had to arrive first with its torch lit (Pausanias 1.30.2; see Aristophanes *Frogs* 1087–98 for an amusing description). Apparently 10 runners per tribe covered a distance of over 2,500 meters from the Academy *gymnasion* to the Acropolis (Fisher 2011: 189–90). The prize for the individual victor probably went to the runner who ran the final leg of the race for the winning team. The “contest of ships” (probably a boat race) with three placements and oxen for prizes, first attested in this inscription, perhaps existed earlier to recognize sailors for assisting Athens’s security and success, or to increase popular participation in the games.

Figure 10.1 Marble relief found in the Athenian Agora showing *apobates* race, fourth century BCE, Agora Museum S399. *Source:* Photograph by Steven Bach. Used with permission.



Table 10.3 List of contests “for warriors” at the Panathenaic Games.

Event	First place	Second place
<i>Number of amphorae awarded</i>		
Horse race	16	4
Horse <i>zeugos</i>	30	6
Processional <i>zeugos</i>	4	1
Javelin from horseback	5	1

The final two sections of the inscription as preserved (both covered in [Table 10.5](#)) concern the *antheppasia*, a competitive riding display by two groups of cavalymen (with each group consisting of men from 5 of the 10 tribal cavalry units), and cyclic choruses, another form of group dancing.⁶

Table 10.4 List of tribal contests at the Panathenaic Games.

Event	Prize
Boys’ pyrrhic dance	1 ox (worth 100 <i>drachmai</i>)
Youths’ pyrrhic dance	1 ox
Men’s pyrrhic dance	1 ox
Contest in manly excellence (<i>euandria</i>)	1 ox
Torch race	Winning tribe: 1 ox Individual victor: 1 hydria (a vase worth 30 <i>drachmai</i>)
Boat race	1st place: 3 oxen 2nd place: 2 oxen 3rd place: 1 ox

Table 10.5 Prizes for the *antheppasia* and cyclic choruses at the Panathenaic Games.

Event
Anthippasia

Men's cyclic chorus

Boys' cyclic chorus

Prize
1st place: ?
2nd place: ?
3rd place: ?
1st place: ?
2nd place: ?
1st place: ?
2nd place: ?

With its many contestants, multiple performances and rituals, and finally the great procession, the Panathenaia was a sacred and spectacular display of unity, power, and piety.⁷ The games celebrated and glorified the city and its goddess, attracted visitors, and satisfied the agonistic inclinations of the Athenians, directly, by (individual or group) competition and, vicariously, by spectatorship.

2.2 Other athletic festivals

Musical, dramatic, and athletic competitions, as well as torch races, choral dancing contests and displays, and more obscure contests, permeated the Athenian calendar of festivals (Kyle 1987: 40–8; Osborne 1993, especially Table 16.1). An elitist conservative, the so-called Old Oligarch, probably writing in the late fifth century, complains, anonymously, that Athens had more festivals than other states (*Constitution of the Athenians* 3.2).⁸ Although it is impossible to provide a comprehensive review of all such festivals here, it is worth briefly discussing some of the more important Athenian festivals, other than the Panathenaia, that included athletic contests.

Ostensibly founded by the mythical Athenian hero Theseus, the Oschophoria included a ritual race by 20 youths (2 from each of the 10 tribes) bearing vine branches from the Temple of Dionysus in the city of Athens to the seacoast at Phaleron, with a prize consisting of a special drink called the “fivefold” (*pentaploia*). In the fifth century the Epitaphia (likely founded in 479) included public funeral games for Athens’s war dead with “games of strength, knowledge, and wealth” (Lysias *Epitaphios* 2.80) – probably gymnastic, musical, and hippic contests. The Bendideia, held in honor of the Thracian goddess Bendis and introduced in 429/8 (Plato *Republic* 327a–8a), featured evening torch races on horseback. The Olympieia, the first evidence for which dates to the fourth century, featured Athens’s cavalry forces and included an *anthippasia* contest.

Athens developed a policy of integrating lesser and local cults into the state festival calendar and redirecting them to give them a civic focus and appeal. Athletic contests held at Eleusis (from the sixth century on), and the Herakleia festival at Marathon (from c.490),

became centralized under Athenian administration. (Eleusis and Marathon were located on the western and eastern limits of Athenian territory, respectively.) The centralizing policy also applied to the hero cult of Theseus and its games (founded c.470).

3 Athletes in Greek Society

Scholarly debate about the extent of nonelite access to gymnastic athletic contests (participation in hippic contests required large-scale expenditures and remained the preserve of the elite) has been lively and is ongoing. This section summarizes scholarly positions on the issues in general and with particular application to Athens. Gardiner's (1930) traditional scenario of early noble amateurs being driven out of sport by lower class professionals misrepresented history from selected bits of literature, but went unchallenged for decades. Pleket (1975) disputed Gardiner's notion of amateurism and asserted the early predominance and the enduring presence of elites in athletics, while accepting that in later periods a certain number of athletes came from non-elite families. Young (1984) also challenged Gardiner on amateurism, and he aggressively argued, against Pleket, that significant numbers of lower class athletes existed from the earliest days of organized athletics.

There now seem to be three schools of thought in regard to elite and nonelite participation in Greek sport. One school accepts increased access over time with socioeconomic changes, but doubts extensive democratization or egalitarianism in athletics in the Archaic and Classical periods. Pleket (1975, 2001, 2005) defends and reasserts his views based on epigraphical evidence. His use of abundant inscriptional evidence from a broad array of times and places in the Greek world counterbalances a tendency of some scholars to keep turning to the same limited number of problematic literary references (e.g., Old Oligarch *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.13, 2.10; Euripides *Autolykos* Fragment 282; Isocrates 16.33). My study of Athenian athletics and athletes (Kyle 1987; also see Kyle 1997), following Pleket but focused on one city-state, argues that sport in Archaic and Classical Athens enhanced civic consciousness and pride, and that although participation remained somewhat elitist in practice, broader socioeconomic changes at Athens aided a significant shift from an elitism of birth to one of wealth (with the increase of the middle class and *nouveaux riches*). Golden (1998: 141–75; 2008: 1–39) interprets Greek sport in general as a realm of social differentiation, and concerning Athens he suggests tensions and divisiveness between

dominant and emerging classes, between hippic and gymnastic competition, and between conservative and democratic agendas: “Athletic competition was ruled by an elitist or at least meritocratic mindset even in democratic Athens” (2008: 26).

A second school of thought is championed by Pritchard (2003, 2009, 2013), who contends that athletic participation was not accessible to poor or nonwealthy families because of the expense of training in privately financed classes taught by *paidotribai* (athletic tutors). According to Pritchard, even in the fifth and fourth centuries, when Athens had a strongly democratic sociopolitical system, “athletics remained an exclusive pursuit of the wealthy” (2003: 332; cf. 2009: 229). He further suggests that, although excluded, lower class Athenians enthusiastically supported the athletic practices of their social superiors because, as rowers in the navy who contributed physically and militarily to the state, they associated themselves ideologically with militaristic agonistic virtues (e.g., training, effort, risk, and excellence (*arete*)) traditionally ascribed to the higher classes and embodied in successful athletes. A common athletic and military culture with positive notions of effort, value, and virtue spanned the classes and assisted social cohesion.

The third school of thought asserts widespread democratization and popular participation. Miller (2000, 2004: 232–4) suggests that nudity, objective judging criteria, and the practice of flogging for infractions in Greek sport made athletes equals, reduced social tensions, and fostered democracy. Recent works that discuss Athens have emphasized meritocratic factors: valuable Panathenaic prizes, state-sponsored tribal team and dancing competitions, state rewards for Panhellenic victories, free access to three public *gymnasias*, numerous wrestling schools (*palaistrai*) and hired trainers, and greater financial resources and improved social mobility in general. Fisher (1998, 2011) argues, especially concerning torch races, that team events (financially subsidized annually by numerous wealthy citizens as an obligatory public service) provided opportunities for thousands of nonelite participants. He also suggests that pederastically motivated wealthier Athenians supported young athletes of lesser status. In effect, Fisher revives Young’s notion (1984, e.g., concerning Croton) that athletic subsidization by the state – and also by personal arrangements – provided the resources needed by aspiring athletes from less-than-wealthy families.

Supporting Fisher’s arguments, and integrating modern sport sociology, Christesen (2007, 2012) asserts a positive reciprocal relationship among meritocracy, democracy, and “mass sport” (broad participation and spectatorship) as they emerged in sixth- and fifth-century Greece. Sociopolitical circumstances affected sport, but sport

also positively affected the functioning of society through socialization, the reinforcement of proper social relations, and consensus among groups. Against Pritchard, he argues that a full education (including an athletic tutor for a boy of 7–15 years) was affordable for Athenian families of middling or modest wealth, if not the poor, and he points out that Athens had more *gymnasia* and training facilities than those needed by a small number of rich citizens. Like Fisher, he feels tribal competitions, especially in dancing in groups, dramatically increased participation in sport at Athens. Ironically but perhaps significantly, Pritchard and Christesen agree that sport assisted social order in democratic Athens, either by shared ideology or meritocracy.

Debate continues because scholars disagree about (1) terms (sport, athletics, elite); (2) factors (prizes, financial support in group events, nudity, pederasty); (3) costs (of private preparation and travel); (4) likelihood of profitable careers; and (5) numbers, duration, and intensity of participation in team events and dancing versus individual Olympic-style gymnastic contests. Ultimately, while social historical studies and sociological models are useful, our evidence, even for Athens, has limitations.

While I agree that meritocratic factors, in tribal team events in particular, made sport more accessible, especially if we include group dancing, I still suggest an “elitism of wealth” (of family financial resources) with respect to individual participation in organized competitions. Sending one’s sons from an early age to an athletic tutor and participation in sport and dancing were socially desirable for status display, but they were not mandatory for all Athenian citizens. Roughly half the Athenian citizen male population belonged to a “working class” without adequate leisure time or the financial resources to pay for athletic training, let alone serious athletic competition. Of course, an exceptionally talented individual might succeed in some events, but that would not have been common. Moreover, basic training under an athletic tutor was a necessary but insufficient precondition for competitive participation in individual gymnastic events at chrematistic games that awarded valuable prizes; successful participation in such games required extensive and expensive training and leisure time. Youths of the upper and middle class were thus more likely than poor Athenians to participate in individual events at organized competitions at all levels, but especially in high-level competitions such as the Panathenaic Games and the Olympics.

4 Athenian Sociopolitical Sport History

In Archaic and Classical Athens sport was a public, highly contested realm of social and political ambitions. Early groups and leaders appreciated that victory at home or at major games abroad brought them public recognition and status validation. Over time, however, as the remaining sections of this essay will show, there were dramatic social and economic changes as Athens became more wealthy, populous, and democratic. Increased meritocracy (fair access and judging based on athletic merit) in sport, and democratization (broader participation and popular sovereignty) in politics, expanded sporting activity in popular public performances. Local *gymnasias* provided prestigious, high profile forums for sociopolitical display, and political leaders patronized and administered games, facilities, and rewards as political capital to promote themselves and their agendas.

Not without tension but generally in a positive way, the shared experiences of competing and spectating at athletic festivals (re)formed the Athenian community, communicating and reinforcing – or contesting – sociopolitical values and order (see König 2009: 379–85 on spectatorship and festivals as representations of community). The growth of sport pleased the citizens, trumpeted the fame of Athens, and encouraged civic harmony and pride.

4.1 Archaic Athens: sport and sociopolitical tensions

Seventh-century Athens knew sporting rivalries and political tensions largely within the aristocratic class, as noble families strove for honor and influence – to be the elite of the elite. They probably competed in local games, but their main focus, consistent with the ideology of building prestige and networks beyond their *polis* (city-state), was on games outside of Athens. Competition at elaborate funeral games and at Olympia affirmed social status. Of Athens's first Olympic victor, Pantakles in 696, we know only that he was a sprinter, but Athenian victors at major games abroad probably were from wealthy, politically active, aristocratic families. Phrynon, the Olympic *pankration* victor in 636, was probably the same Phrynon who became a general and a founder of colonies. Kylon, the rich son-in-law of the tyrant of Megara, won the Olympic *diaulos* in 640 and later made an ill-fated attempt to

become a tyrant at Athens. (For testimonia on Athenian athletes mentioned here, see Kyle 1987: 102–23, 195–228.)

In the early years of the sixth century, the Athenian statesman Solon enacted political reforms that made wealth, rather than birth, the basis for eligibility to hold high office, and his reform of the popular assembly and courts, along with his economic policies, increased sociopolitical access and mobility for much of Athens's populace. Solon also legislated monetary rewards for Athenian victors in Panhellenic athletic contests: 500 *drachmai* for an Olympic victory – estimated by Young (2004: 98) as roughly equivalent to US\$700,000 – and 100 *drachmai* for an Isthmian victory. He probably did this to encourage Athenians to see athletics, as well as politics, as a civic and not a private matter (Kyle 1984, but cf. Mann 2001: 70–81).

4.2 *The Panathenaia and tyranny*

In the 560 s, amid increasingly virulent political factionalism, some leader or group in Athens opportunistically promoted the Panathenaia as a forum for ceremony, competition, and recreation. Unfortunately, the sources are too scanty to achieve any degree of certainty as to who was responsible for what innovations (see Kyle 1987: 22–31; Anderson 2003: 67–76; Neils 2007).

The long tyranny of Peisistratos and his sons Hippias and Hipparchos (561–510) threatened aristocrats' athletic dominance. The tyrants, rather typically, were civic boosters who sought popular support through public projects and entertainments. Fostering civic athletics to please the people and to dissipate tensions, they made a concerted effort to promote the cult of Athena. The Peisistratids are associated with embellishing the Panathenaic Way and holding contests in the *agora*, including contests in rhapsodic recitations of Homer. Hipparchos is credited with a costly wall around the Academy *gymnasion*, within which Peisistratos dedicated an altar to Eros (on Athenian athletic facilities, see Kyle 1987: 56–101). The tyrants actively sponsored the Panathenaic festival and its contests; Hippias was organizing the Panathenaic procession when Hipparchos was assassinated in 514 (Phillips 2003: 204–8).

Like most tyrants, Peisistratos drove other aristocrats out of Athens, allowing some to return only through their concessions to his power. Hardly idle, notable families still publicized themselves as victors and patrons. When Kimon, a member of a wealthy and powerful Athenian family, won his second Olympic victory in the four-horse chariot race in 532, he had Peisistratos declared the official victor, and the tyrant let him return to Athens from exile (Herodotus

6.103). Peisistratos clearly enjoyed the prestige of being an Olympic victor. When Kimon won a third time in 528, however, he was killed at Athens, arguably because Peisistratos's sons resented his high profile (Connor 1971: 10–11; Kyle 1987: 111–12, 158).

After Spartan military intervention brought about the end of the Peisistratid tyranny in 510, the Athenian citizenry rejected a Spartan-backed conservative regime and in 508, under the leadership of a reformer named Kleisthenes, established a relatively egalitarian and democratic sociopolitical system that entailed the formation of 10 new tribes as basic subdivisions of the Athenian populace (Thorley 2004: 22–50). An aristocrat from a famous horse-racing family, Kleisthenes understood the political usefulness of sport, and scholars associate the addition or expansion of tribal contests at the Panathenaic Games with the Kleisthenic reforms (Neils 1994; Fisher 2011: 179–82). Tribal team events certainly promoted middle-class participation in sport as well as stronger bonds between Athenians and their tribes.

4.3 Classical Athens

Fifth-century Athenian sport history unfolded in the context of a long-running military conflict between Athens and Persia, in which Athenian success was initially derived from the skill of its infantrymen, who typically came from relatively wealthy families, but that more and more came to depend on its navy, which was manned largely by rowers from poorer families. As Athens became more affluent, meritocratic, and democratic, emerging groups emulated the sporting pastimes of the privileged classes, competing in gymnastic and tribal events, and exercising nude in the *gymnasia*. Some of these new athletes seem to have come from wealthy but nonaristocratic families (Kyle 1987: 113–19). Kallias, son of Didymias (not to be confused with a homonymous Athenian victor in the hippic events at the Olympic and Pythian Games from an aristocratic clan who was active in the first half of the sixth century) won the *pankration* at Olympia in 472, as well as at Isthmia, Nemea, and Delphi, and also in the Panathenaia. This Kallias did not come from an aristocratic clan and may later have been active politically in opposition to Pericles, for he seems to have been in danger of being ostracized (Kyle 1987: 161). Another pankratiast, Autolykos, a Panathenaic victor in 421/0, and his father, Lykon, were conspicuous and reasonably wealthy men, but not from an aristocratic clan (Kyle 1987: 114, 117, 161).

As the democracy strengthened, aspiring statesmen tended to avoid demanding personal gymnastic competition as a means to public exposure and influence and instead approached athletics indirectly, as

benefactors. Recognizing the political value of fostering games for their careers, for social order and civic consciousness, and also for military preparedness on land and at sea, generals such as Kimon and Pericles dispensed popular patronage and expanded opportunities and facilities for leisure and sport. Kimon (born c.510, died 450, a descendant of the Kimon mentioned earlier) used his private wealth to beautify Athens's recreational areas, planting shade trees in the *agora*, and embellishing the Academy *gymnasion* with water channels, shade trees, and tracks for running (Plutarch *Kimon* 13.7; Kyle 1987: 73–4). Kimon's rival Pericles (born c.495, died 429) made Athens even more democratic than it had been when he came to power, and he actively promoted festivals and contests. During his long, influential career he expanded tribal military events (e.g., pyrrhic, cavalry, and boat contests). In 442 he was an *athlothes*, one of the officials who organized the Panathenaic festival, and he probably built the Odeion in the *agora* as a venue for musical contests around the same time (Plutarch *Pericles* 13.5). He also seems to have been responsible for a renovation of the Lyceum *gymnasion* and for the renewal of the practice of awarding of a free meal daily in the town hall to Athenian Panhellenic victors (Kyle 1987: 79, 145–7).

Pericles' policies on sport incited some limited criticism. (On critics of sport, see Kyle 1987: 124–41 and Chapter 21 in this volume.) The so-called Old Oligarch complains that the poor enjoy, while the rich pay for, festivals and contests, that Athens's athletically inept masses want frequent festivals and sacrifices with meat distributions, and that greed moved them to participate in singing, running, and dancing contests (*Constitution of the Athenians* 1.13, 2.9). He also suggests (2.10) that while some wealthy people have private sports facilities, commoners have built more public facilities, which they use more than the wealthy do. Grudgingly he concedes that the people had the power, and that oligarchic disagreement mattered little.

Alcibiades, Pericles' ward, sought a quick and easy route to power and, to that end, in 416 went to Olympia seeking fame. Entering seven chariots, he was placed first, second, and (third or) fourth, and his extravagant socializing at Olympia attracted attention and controversy back in Athens (Golden 1998: 169–71; Kyle 2007: 172–3; Papakonstantinou 2003). In his speech encouraging the Athenians to invade Sicily in 415, Alcibiades boasted that his Olympic success conveyed honor and power, for which Athens should be grateful (Thucydides 6.16.2). An Olympic victor only by means of wealth, he nonetheless declared himself superior to his fellow citizens, who then approved his plans for Sicily. Roughly two decades later, Isocrates argued that Alcibiades could have competed bodily but chose not to because he knew that “some athletes” were lower class, ill-educated,

and from “lesser states” (a point aimed at Athenian nationalism?), so he chose chariot competition as “undeniably a matter of wealth” (16.33). Isocrates’ words suggest the presence of nonelite athletes in gymnastic sport in some number (beyond Athens?), but they also conveniently excuse Alcibiades from arduous gymnastic training, which would have delayed his political ambitions.⁹

After its defeat in the Peloponnesian War (431–404), Athens’s athletic program continued and probably expanded. We know of several fourth-century Athenian athletes, especially in running and combat sports; some seem to be from recently wealthy families, while the backgrounds of others are obscure. The career of Dioxippos, an Olympic *pankration* victor who accompanied Alexander the Great (Kyle 1987: 119–20, 150–1), and the accusation of bribery at Olympia against the pentathlete Kallippos in 322 (Kyle 1987: 119–20), may indicate that financial or occupational “professionalism” was not far off. Competition seems to have been a personal matter of status display, and sport increasingly involved educational and military training.

5 Conclusion

Sport and politics were realms of contestation at Athens, and there were tensions and negotiations as athletic programs and participation grew. Athenian sport and politics became more meritocratic and democratic in theory than in practice, but overall, sport – especially at the Great Panathenaia – was a positive, integrating factor in Athenian society. Hugh Lee has noted that “even as sport asserts or reinforces differences, it can also promote a discourse of unity. The wonder of Greek sport is that it somehow forged divergent social classes and quarrelsome city-states into a Pan-Hellenic community, which fostered and celebrated athletic *arete*” (1999: 400–1). Athens’s famous festivals, athletes, diverse contests, and rich prizes inspired civic pride and promoted the state as a political community. Pericles, Isocrates, and the Old Oligarch too, were right about the popularity of athletic festivals as cherished celebrations of democratic Athens.

NOTES

¹ All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

² Civic athletic festivals were typically *chrematitic*, which is to say

that they offered victors valuable prizes. The great Panhellenic athletic festivals such as the Olympic Games were stephanitic, which is to say that they offered only wreaths as prizes. (Hence they are sometimes also called crown or sacred-crown games.) For more on the difference between stephanitic and chrematitic games, see Chapters 1 and 23 in this volume and Remijsen 2011. The early Panathenaic Games were not classified as stephanitic, but sixth-century vase paintings show officials at the Panathenaic Games crowning victors with wreaths; see Valavanis 1990.

3 On the program of events at the Panathenaic Games, see Johnston 1987; Kyle 1987: 178–94; Kyle 1992: 82–97; Neils 1992b: 14–17; Bentz 1998: 11–22; Neils and Tracy 2003: 13–27; Shear 2003a and b.

4 On Athenian tribes, see Thorley 2004: 19–26.

5 For details on pyrrhic dancing, see Ceccarelli 2004.

6 On the *anthippasia*, see Camp 1998: 28–33. For details on cyclic choruses, see Goette 2007: 117, 122–3.

7 For the depiction of the Panathenaia on the Parthenon frieze, see Neils 1996a and Neils 2001.

8 This treatise was erroneously ascribed to the Athenian author Xenophon and sometimes appears in modern publications of Xenophon’s work. For an English translation, see Marr and Rhodes 2008.

9 Alcibiades was a gymnasiarch (on which see Pleket’s essay on inscriptions, Chapter 6) and was involved in legislation regarding the Kynosarges *gymnasion* (Isocrates 16.35; Athenaeus 234e; *Inscriptiones Graecae* I³ 134; Pritchard 2009: 213).

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Neils and Tracy 2003; Miller 2004: 132–45; and Valavanis 2004: 336–91 offer excellent introductions to the Panathenaic Games. Kyle 1987 innovatively focused on athletics in the city-state of Athens, and several studies have expanded beyond that study. Essential now on the Panathenaia are works written or edited by Neils (1992a–c, 1994, 1996a and b, 2001, 2007); Shear (2003b); and Palagia and Choremi-Spetsieri (2007). On the relevant epigraphical evidence, see Tracy 1991; Tracy and Habicht 1991; and Shear 2003b.

Panathenaic prize amphorae have been much studied and debated; essential now is Bentz 1998, with its extensive, detailed catalog and historical discussions (on events, prizes, changes over time). See also Neils 1992c and essays in Palagia and Choremi-Spetsieri 2007.

On Athenian athletes and social history (class and social mobility), Kyle 1987 remains useful, but see Fisher 1998, 2011; Christesen 2012: 143–51, 164–78; and Pritchard 2003, 2009, and 2013. More generally on Greek athletes and society, see Young 1984, 2004; Golden 1998, 2008; and Pleket 1975, 2001.

CHAPTER 11

Athletic Festivals in the Northern Peloponnese and Central Greece

David Gilman Romano

1 Introduction

By the end of the sixth century BCE, and for centuries thereafter, the cities and sanctuaries of the northern Peloponnese and central Greece were known for religious festivals that often included athletic competitions.¹ Indeed, this was one of the areas of the ancient Greek world where there was the highest concentration of such festivals.

Whereas games at Olympia emerged sometime around the eighth century, major athletic festivals arose in the sixth century at interstate sanctuaries at Delphi in central Greece and at Isthmia and Nemea in the Peloponnese (see [Map 11.1](#)). Later known as the *periodos* or circuit, all four of these “crown” games had contests open to all Greeks, arranged truces, and gave prizes in the form of wreaths, but each one also had its own distinctive features.² The festivals at Olympia and Nemea, both dedicated to Zeus, were most alike in their athletic programs. The festivals at Delphi and Isthmia, dedicated to Apollo and Poseidon, respectively, had elaborate programs that shared some elements with Olympia, but also featured musical contests that were lacking at Olympia and Nemea. The Peloponnese was also home to a number of other lesser, but still important, athletic festivals, such as those at Epidauros (Miller 2004a: 129–32; Sève 1993).

This essay surveys the locations, sites, history, programs, and operation of the Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games. (On the Olympics, see Chapter 8 in this volume.) It focuses on the Archaic (700–480) and Classical (480–323) periods, with glimpses into the early part of the Hellenistic (323–31) period. It also looks in some

detail at the athletic contests held at Mt Lykaion, where recent excavations have produced intriguing new evidence bearing on the history of sport in the Greek world. The concluding section explores the possibility that the athletic contests at Mt Lykaion antedated those at Olympia.

Map 11.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.

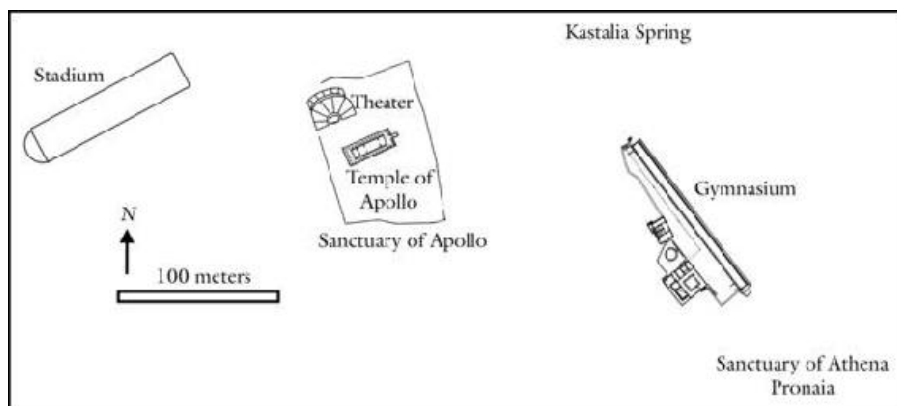


Our information comes mostly from ancient literary sources, especially Pausanias, and from many years of archaeological work at the various sites. As other essays in this volume demonstrate (see, for example, Chapter 19), although religion and sport took center stage at athletic festivals, the sites, organizers, and even the spectators were on display as well. Social and political interactions and assorted fringe persons and activities (see Chapter 17) were all part of the phenomenon.

2 The Pythian Games at Delphi

Both literary sources and inscriptions show that there was a distinct hierarchy within the *periodos*, with the Olympics enjoying the most prestige, followed by the Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games (in that order) (Cairns 1991). The Pythian Games, held every fourth year at the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, were thus the second most prestigious set of athletic contests in the Greek world. As at Olympia, the location (on the slope of Mt Parnassos in Phocis, about 600 meters above the Gulf of Corinth) at a hallowed interstate sanctuary of a major god aided the prestige and success of the games.

Map 11.2 Plan of the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi and surrounding areas.



According to myth (e.g., Hyginus *Fabulae* 140), Apollo established a musical contest at Delphi after killing the great serpent Pytho, who guarded the site for his mother Gaia. The site of what became the sanctuary of Apollo (Map 11.2) was occupied in the Late Bronze Age (1600–1100) by an extensive settlement that included cult areas and cemeteries. That settlement was abandoned at the end of the Bronze Age, and there is no sign of sustained activity at the site until c.875 when a new village was established. The first evidence for cult dates to c.825; the finds from the site indicate that it was initially a purely local sanctuary. Religious activity expanded rapidly starting in the early years of the eighth century, and another major upward shift took place at the end of that century, at which point the sanctuary began attracting visitors from increasingly distant places (Morgan 1990: 106–47).

It is likely, though not certain, that the oracle, which became the most famous of its kind in the entire Greek world, started to function sometime in the second half of the eighth century and may have been partly responsible for the increasing popularity of the sanctuary. In

later periods, for which much better sources are available, the oracle of Apollo at Delphi was always a priestess who was assisted by male priests. There were typically one or two such priestesses at any given time, and they carried out their duties while sitting in a tripod in the inner sanctum of the Temple of Apollo, perhaps inhaling psychedelic natural gasses from a cleft (Lehoux 2007/8; Morgan 1990: 148–90).

In the early part of the sixth century the Amphictyony of Anthela took over administration of the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. The history of this period is confused, but it would appear that the nearby city-state of Krisa aggressively sought to control movement to and from Delphi by sea and to profit from the flow of visitors to the site. This provoked an attack by a religious association, the Amphictyony of Anthela, which was based in the sanctuary of Demeter at Thermopylai. The resulting conflict, the First Sacred War (c.600–c.586), ended with the defeat of Krisa (Morgan 1990: 113–34; Sánchez 2001: 31–80).

Among the first acts of the Amphictyony after it took charge of the sanctuary of Apollo was to found a quadrennial festival that featured gymnastic, equestrian, and musical competitions. ³ This festival built upon a preexisting one that featured a contest in singing a hymn to Apollo to the music of a *kithara* (a stringed instrument resembling a small harp). The program of the revamped festival was clearly influenced by the Olympic Games, and, like the Olympics, competitors were divided into two age-classes, men and boys. There were, nonetheless, divergences (see Table 11.1); for example, the Pythian Games offered more gymnastic events for boys than the Olympics, but did not include boys' wrestling, which had a long history at Olympia.⁴ The fundamental difference between the Olympic and Pythian Games, however, was the inclusion in the latter of a number of musical contests. The initial program of musical contests at the Pythian Games consisted of singing to the accompaniment of the *kithara*, playing the *aulos* (a kind of flute), and singing to the accompaniment of the *aulos*. The last of these was not held again after 586, but playing the *kithara* was added in 558. The program of musical events remained unchanged down through the fourth century, but by the Roman period it had expanded considerably to include dance, drama, acting, painting, and rhetoric (Pausanias 10.7.2–7; Amandry 1990: 306–10; Picard 1989: 72–6; Weir 2004: 21–2).

Table 11.1 List of gymnastic and equestrian events at the Olympic and Pythian Games.

Event	Olympia	Delphi
Footraces		

Men's <i>stadion</i>	yes (776) ^a	yes (586)
Boys' <i>stadion</i>	yes (632)	yes (586)
Men's <i>diaulos</i>	yes (724)	yes (586)
Boys' <i>diaulos</i>	no	yes (586)
Men's <i>dolichos</i>	yes (720)	yes (586)
Boys' <i>dolichos</i>	no	yes (586)
Men's <i>hoplitodromos</i>	yes (520)	yes (498)
<i>Pentathlon</i>		
Men's	yes (708)	yes (586)
Boys'	no ^b	yes (586)
<i>Combat sports</i>		
Men's boxing	yes (688)	yes (586)
Boys' boxing	yes (616)	yes (586)
Men's <i>pankration</i>	yes (648)	yes (586)
Boys' <i>pankration</i>	yes (200)	yes (346)
Men's wrestling	yes (708)	yes (586)
Boys' wrestling	yes (632)	no
<i>Equestrian events</i>		
Four-horse chariot race	yes (680)	yes (582)
Two-horse chariot race	yes (408)	yes (398)
Four-colt chariot race	yes (384)	yes (378)
Two-colt chariot race	yes (268)	yes (338)
Horse race	yes (648)	yes (586)
Colt race	yes (256)	yes (314)

^a The numbers in parentheses indicate the year when the event in question was added to the Olympic or Pythian program. The accuracy of the dates at which events were added to the Olympic program prior to the sixth century is questionable. See Christesen 2007: 16–17, 476–8. This chart draws on Christesen 2007: 17 and Miller 2004b: 202 (cf. Weir 2004: 21).

^b The boys' pentathlon was held at the Olympics in 628, then immediately and permanently dropped from the program.

Victors at the first iteration of the Pythian Games in 586 received material prizes, probably tripods, but starting in 582 the only prizes offered were wreaths of laurel (Pausanias 10.7.5).⁵ Laurel was sacred to Apollo, and the branches from which victors' wreaths were made came from a tree in the Valley of Tempe (where, according to myth, Apollo had been purified after killing Pytho) (Plutarch *Moralia* 1136a). Like Olympia, Delphi proclaimed a truce for its games (Amandry 1990: 282–95). Aristotle compiled a list of Pythian victors, as he did for Olympia, and an honorific inscription from Delphi records that Aristotle's list was to be copied onto stone (Christesen 2007: 179–202).

Archaeological work at Delphi has been conducted under the auspices of the École Française d'Athènes since the nineteenth century CE and during this time much information has come to light about the physical structure of the site. Delphi had a full complement of facilities to support the contests held at the Pythian Games. Originally the athletic events perhaps took place on the plain that lies between Delphi and the sea, and the equestrian events were always held in that area. In the fifth century a stadium was added above the temple; and this structure was subsequently repaired and enhanced on multiple

occasions (Aupert 1979). An inscription on its retaining wall prohibits (and sets fines for) bringing wine into the stadium (*Corpus des inscriptions de Delphes* 1.3; Miller 2004b: no. 100). Other athletic facilities at Delphi include a substantial *gymnasion* complex, which was built c.330 and which featured a *palaistra*, covered and outdoor tracks, baths, and a small pool.⁶ The theater, which was located just above the temple and which was the site of the musical contests held as part of the Pythian Games, dates to the second century. The siting of the musical contests before the third century, when they were held in the stadium, is unknown (Bommelaer 1991: 207–12).

The sanctuary at Delphi was also home to a famous temple, treasuries, and numerous votive dedications. Pausanias, who visited the site in the second century CE, recorded a local tradition that there were three successive early temples of Apollo on the site, made from laurel, bees' wax and feathers, and bronze (10.5.9–12). No trace of such structures has survived, and the earliest extant remains of a temple at Delphi date to the second half of the seventh century. The Apollo temple currently visible on the site was erected in the fourth century (Bommelaer 1991: 176–84; Morgan 1990: 129–35; Scott 2010: 25, 56–9, 65–6, 114, 118, 137–8, 230). Some of the most famous buildings at Delphi are treasuries, small structures erected by individual communities to house expensive votive offerings. Approximately thirty different treasuries existed at Delphi at various points in time and boasted some of the most elaborate architecture and sculpture at the site (Partida 2000; Scott 2010: 41–145). Delphi also housed magnificent works of art, most of which are no longer extant. We are, however, fortunate to have the famous bronze statue known as the Charioteer of Delphi. Only the charioteer and minor pieces remain from an original dedication made c.474 by Polyzeus, tyrant of Gela in Sicily, and consisting of a statue group of a four-horse chariot with a victor and driver. (For further discussion and an illustration, see Chapter 12.)

3 The Isthmian Games

The sanctuary of Isthmia was located about 13 kilometers east of Corinth, on the eastern side of the Isthmus of Corinth and directly on major north–south and east–west land and sea routes. Both the sanctuary and the games held there were supervised by the city-state of Corinth.

There were two different mythical accounts of the origins of the Isthmian Games. In one, King Sisyphos of Corinth founded funeral

games for his nephew Melikertes, who had drowned nearby (Pausanias 1.44.7–8). The other myth (Plutarch *Theseus* 25.4–5) says Theseus of Athens founded games for Poseidon at the Isthmus because Herakles began games for Zeus at Olympia. Different traditions say Theseus started the games to honor Skiron or Sinis, whom he killed in his labors.

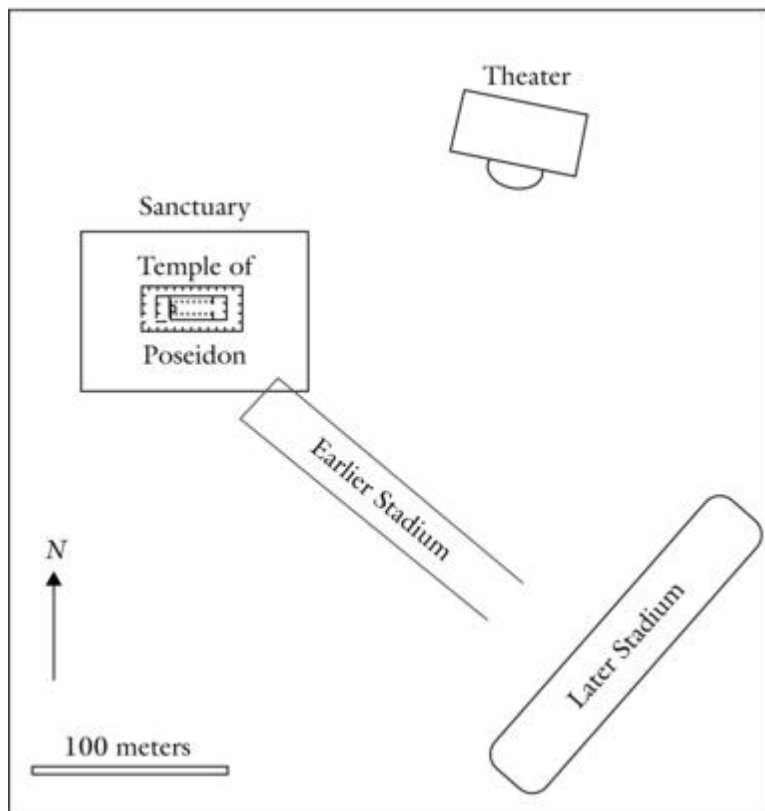
Archaeological finds (e.g., ritual vessels, terracotta dedications) indicate cult activity at the site from the mid-eleventh century on, and early metal dedications (Jackson 1992) show increasing elite participation from c.700 on. As at Olympia, a local sanctuary became the focus of expanding interest. By tradition, in 580, an earlier festival at Isthmia was reorganized to be held biennially, two years before, the same year as, and two years after the Olympic Games (Gebhard 1989: 82–4; 1993a; 2002; Miller 2004a: 101–4; Morgan 2002). Corinth was sacked by the Romans in 146, at which point the Isthmian Games were transferred to Sicyon, which lay just to the west of Corinth. When Corinth was resettled in 44, the Isthmian Games were returned to Corinthian control (Gebhard 1993b; Gebhard, Hemans, and Hayes 1998; Kajava 2002).

The program of events at the Isthmian Games was closer to that at the Pythian than the Olympic Games in that it included not only gymnastic and equestrian competitions, but also musical contests. The textual sources for the history of the Isthmian (and Nemean) Games are significantly less abundant than those for the Olympic and Pythian Games, and it is, as a result, not possible to recount in detail the evolution of the program of events at Isthmia (Christesen 2007: 108–12). We do know that competitors at Isthmia were divided into three age-classes (boys, youths, and men) and that there was a footrace called the *hippios*, in which competitors ran a distance of four *stadia* (roughly 800 meters), that was not held at the Olympic or Pythian Games (Bacchylides 10.24–6; Pausanias 6.16.4).⁷ We also know that there were various contests in music, recitation, writing, painting, and, apparently, a boat race. Unfortunately, it is for the most part unclear when a particular contest was first held. The original prize of a wreath of pine was later changed to a wreath of dry celery, perhaps out of rivalry with Nemea (Plutarch *Moralia* 676f; Broneer 1962).

Excavations under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens have revealed the remains of two *stadia*, of different dates, at Isthmia (see [Map 11.3](#)). The earlier stadium, situated close to the Temple of Poseidon, was initially constructed in the early part of the sixth century, at the time of the establishment of the Isthmian Games. In order to create a sufficiently large level space, tons of fill were brought in, and the original ground level was in some places raised more than five meters. This stadium was reconstructed in the

later fifth century, at which time a new starting line, complete with postholes and a starter's pit, was installed. This pit seems to have been part of a mechanism (*hysplex*) consisting of 16 wooden gates that opened when the starter released ropes leading to each gate. Soon this system was replaced with a traditional starting line with single toe grooves.⁸ The later stadium, which dates to the end of the fourth century, lies some 250 meters to the southeast of the Temple of Poseidon; it awaits full excavation (Gebhard 1992; Romano 1993: 24–33, 81–4; Miller 2004a: 38–40).

Map 11.3 Plan of the sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia and surrounding areas.



Other facilities at Isthmia included a theater and a hippodrome. The earliest theater at the site dates to the fifth century and was located 50 meters northeast of the Temple of Poseidon. This structure was repeatedly remodeled in the centuries that followed. The location of the hippodrome is not known for certain, but it has been suggested that it was situated 2 kilometers to the west of the sanctuary (Gebhard 1973, 1989: 86–8).

Isthmia was also notable for an array of religious architecture,

including a well-known Temple of Poseidon. The first such temple at the site was built in the second half of the seventh century and featured recent architectural innovations, including clay roof tiles and exterior walls adorned with painted decoration. This structure burnt to the ground c.470 and was rapidly replaced, though that building too was damaged by fire, in 390. The rebuilt temple stood until the end of the fourth century CE (Broneer 1971; Gebhard 1989: 84–5; Morgan 2003: 143–8).

The festival at Isthmia attracted crowds from all over the Greek world and offered opportunities for political announcements and enterprising sophists and merchants. An oration of 97 CE by Dio Chrysostom (*Orations* 8.9–12; Miller 2004a: no. 145), ostensibly recounting a visit by Diogenes the Cynic to the Isthmian Games in the mid-fourth century, reveals various extraneous activities (see Chapter 17). Unfortunately, the festival also experienced political intrigue and violence. Owing to a mysterious “Curse of Moline” (Pausanias 5.2.1–2) Eleians boycotted the Isthmian Games throughout antiquity (Pausanias 6.3.9, 6.16.2). At the games of 412 Athenians were able to learn of a Peloponnesian naval effort to support an anti-Athenian revolution at Chios (Thucydides 8.9.1–2). In 390 Argos and Sparta battled for control of the sanctuary and rival games were staged by Argos and Corinth (Xenophon *Hellenika* 4.5.1–2,4). Isthmia nevertheless suffered less disruption than Nemea.

4 The Nemean Games

Nemea was located 30 kilometers southwest of Corinth in a remote, rural area of the Peloponnese. The Nemean Games were the least prestigious of the four sets of contests that made up the *periodos* and were relatively short lived, but our knowledge of the history of the site and the operation of the athletic festival is abundant thanks to excavations conducted under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

Two foundation myths concern the establishment of this festival. The first is the story of Herakles who killed the Nemean lion here as the first of his 12 labors and ostensibly founded the Nemean Games while at the site. The other myth involves the death of Opheltes, infant son of King Lycurgus of Nemea, who was killed by a snake. After his death, the story goes, a hero cult and funeral games were established with crowns of wild celery (Hyginus *Fabulae* 74; Apollodorus *Library* 3.6.4).

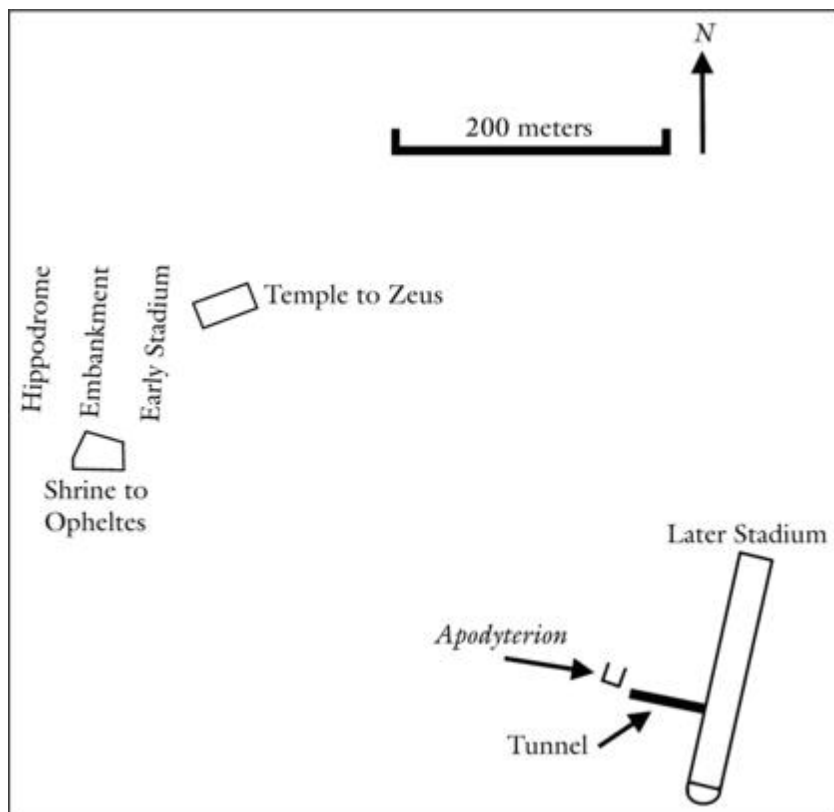
In 573 the community of Kleonai built a temple for Zeus at what

seems to have been a preexisting sanctuary at Nemea and established a festival in his honor. Kleonai had a close but complicated relation with the much larger and more powerful city-state of Argos, about 25 kilometers to the southeast, and Argos clearly played an important role in the administration of the Nemean Games throughout their history. The sanctuary suffered a major, violent destruction c.415 and lay in ruins for several decades thereafter; in the aftermath of this incident the Nemean Games were likely moved to Argos. In the closing decades of the fourth century they were returned to Nemea, and an impressive building program restored and embellished the sanctuary. However, the Nemean Games were being held once again in Argos by c.270, and the sanctuary of Zeus at Nemea suffered a gradual decline (Miller 1989, 1992, 2004a: 105–11). When Pausanias visited the site in the second century CE, it was largely abandoned (2.15.2–3).

The Nemean Games included both gymnastic and equestrian contests; musical contests were not part of the initial program but were added after the end of the Classical period. Like Isthmia, competitors were divided into three age groups, and the gymnastic competitions included the *hippios*. Inscriptions show that a truce was announced and envoys (*theoroi*) were sent throughout Greece in groups of six, visiting various cities and being received by local representatives (Miller 1988). Victors received a crown of wild celery (Miller 2004a: 107).

There were two major building phases at Nemea, one linked to the foundation of the Nemean Games in 573 and another to the return of the games in the 330s. The structures associated with the first phase included a temple to Zeus and a shrine to Opheltes (see [Map 11.4](#)). The Opheltes shrine, perhaps inspired by the Pelopeion at Olympia, featured an embankment that accommodated spectators at a stadium and hippodrome that were located on either side of it (Miller 2002; 2004a: 37–8, 110–11). The late fourth-century building program included a new stadium located 450 meters southeast of the temple. Its original and traditional starting line with a stone sill and grooves was later recut (after the 330 s but before the 270s) to accept a new starting mechanism (*hysplex*) using the tension from twisted rope to drop rope barriers from all the lanes at the same time (see Chapter 18). A well-preserved 36 meter-long vaulted entrance tunnel with extant graffiti on its walls connected the stadium to a changing room (*apodyterion*). Many roof tiles from the structure were found, complete with the name Sosikles, the Argive architect in charge of the construction (Miller 2001: 164–72).

Map 11.4 Plan of the sanctuary of Zeus at Nemea and surrounding areas.



5 The Sanctuary of Zeus at Mt Lykaion in Arcadia

As noted at the start of the chapter, a substantial number of communities and sanctuaries in central Greece and the northern Peloponnese hosted athletic festivals that, although not as prestigious as the games of the *periodos*, nonetheless were of considerable significance. One of the most intriguing festivals was held at the sanctuary of Zeus on Mt Lykaion, which was in the Archaic and Classical periods (and perhaps at other times) the most prominent sanctuary in Arcadia (Jost 1985: 183–5).

The relevant literary and epigraphic evidence makes it clear that by the early part of the fifth century Mt Lykaion was the site of an important athletic festival, the Lykaia. Pindar refers in his *epinikia* (odes celebrating athletic victories) to the Lykaia on several occasions (*Olympian* 7.84, 9.97, 13.108; *Nemean* 10.45–8). He tells us that the prize at the Lykaion Games was bronze, possibly, though not certainly,

in the form of tripods (Ringwood 1927: 97). (Tripods were a common form of athletic prize from an early period in the Greek world; see Chapter 3.) The question of whether the festival was held every second or fourth year remains under study. It appears that the Lykaion Games were moved from Mt Lykaion to the city of Megalopolis in the third century.

Invaluable insight into the program of events is provided by two inscriptions recovered in excavations at the site undertaken by Konstantinos Kourouniotis in the early part of the twentieth century (*Inscriptiones Graecae* V 2 549–50).⁹ These inscriptions contain lists of victors at five or six different iterations of the Lykaion Games from the end of the fourth century. At that point in time the gymnastic component of the Lykaion Games consisted of contests for boys in the *stadion*, wrestling, and boxing and for men in *stadion*, *diaulos*, *dolichos*, *hoplitodromos*, pentathlon, boxing, wrestling, and *pankration*. The equestrian component of the festival was comprised of a two-horse chariot race, a four-colt chariot race, and a horse race.¹⁰

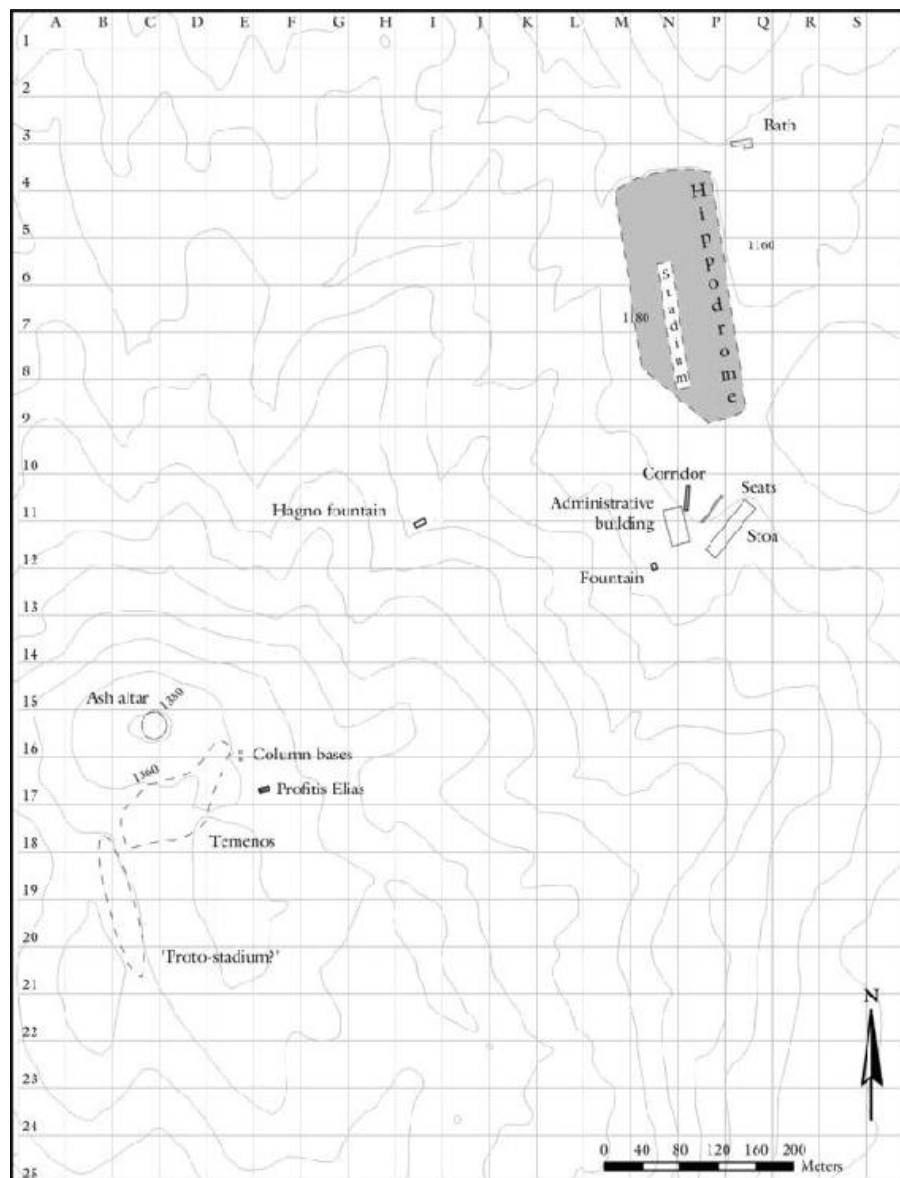
The majority of the victors in the inscriptions come from either Arcadia or Argos, suggesting that most participants did not travel great distances, but a sprinkling of victors from other places, including Miletos and Syracuse, shows that the Lykaia's appeal was more than local. At least some elite athletes took part since Diagoras of Rhodes, one of the most successful athletes of his generation, won the boxing contest at the Lykaion Games at some point in the first half of the fifth century (Pindar *Olympian* 7.84). Furthermore, the inscriptions from the site show that the pentathlon at one iteration of the festival was won by an Arcadian named Alexibios, whom Moretti has plausibly identified with the athlete of the same name who won the pentathlon at Olympia in 312 (Moretti 1957: no. 483).

Another notable victor was Lagos, son of Ptolemy, who appears in the inscriptions as a winner of the two-horse chariot race (*Inscriptiones Graecae* V 2 550, ll. 8–9). This was almost certainly one of the sons of King Ptolemy I of Egypt (Criscuolo 2003: 312 n. 4), which indicates that the Lykaia had a sufficiently high profile to attract the attention of the Ptolemies, who were avid competitors in equestrian events in athletic festivals in the Greek homeland. (For further discussion of the Ptolemies' equestrian ambitions, see Chapter 23.)

In the past decade ongoing work undertaken as part of the Mt Lykaion Excavation and Survey Project directed by the 39th Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities in Tripolis in collaboration with and under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens has greatly extended our knowledge of the site (see [Map 11.5](#)). The physical remains at Mt Lykaion are clustered in two distinct areas: the southern peak of Mt Lykaion (at 1,382 meters above

sea level) and in a meadow about 200 meters below the peak (Romano 2005; Romano and Voyatzis 2010). At the former site there is an ash altar and *temenos* (sacred precinct) dedicated to Zeus. In the meadow there exists a hippodrome, a stadium, a stoa, an administrative building, a bath facility, two fountain houses, and an area of stone seats. Pausanias also mentions a sanctuary of Pan in this area (8.36.5), though it has not to date been located. Many of the structures in the meadow were likely built in the second quarter of the fourth century. The archaeological evidence associated with the hippodrome, and the aforementioned victor inscriptions, suggest that the hippodrome was in use in the fourth century; it is not yet clear when it was constructed.

Map 11.5 Plan of the sanctuary of Zeus at Mt Lykaion and surrounding areas.



The hippodrome is of great interest because it is the only example in the entire Greek world that can be visualized and measured. It is situated on a flat piece of land that is partially cut down from the bedrock and partially artificially filled. The overall dimensions of the hippodrome are 260 meters long and 102 meters wide. Its shape is irregular, with an oblique side on the southwest end where it intersected a low terrace wall. To the north, west, and east sides the available space for the hippodrome was limited by several low hills. There is no retaining wall to the north, but there are the remains of one to the east.

Parts of two tapering, stone columns that are likely to have been the turning posts for the facility have been recovered from the modern surface of the hippodrome. Each is characterized by several unfluted column drums that once stood together on a stone base. The total restored height of each of the turning posts was 2.94 meters, although there may have been small capping stones on top of the column drums that have not been found. We do not have their original locations, but Kourouniotis, the original excavator, found them approximately 60 meters apart.

Recent excavations have included work in the hippodrome, and some of our results have included finding the surface of the hippodrome floor, which consisted of hard packed clay, in several places. Geophysical remote sensing and excavation has produced no evidence for an interior barrier wall, as commonly found in Roman circuses. In addition, geophysical remote sensing has not found evidence of starting gates at either end of the facility.

The hippodrome is also noteworthy because it has within its limits the *dromos* (track) of a stadium. It appears that the hippodrome and stadium were constructed as two parts of a whole. The combination of hippodrome and stadium in one facility is not known from any other site in mainland Greece, which makes the details of the facility at Mt Lykaion of considerable importance.¹¹

The archaeological evidence for the stadium, which is mentioned by Pausanias (8.38.5) in the context of describing the sanctuary of Pan and the hippodrome, consists of seven stone starting line blocks that have been discovered on the modern surface of the meadow. Several of these blocks were found immediately adjacent to one another. They have two parallel grooves, and some of them include postholes. The location of most of the starting line blocks, in a line toward the middle of the hippodrome, suggests that they have been found *in situ* or close to their original positions. Although the other end of the *dromos* has yet to be discovered, there is at the southern end of the hippodrome a low terrace wall that would prevent the *dromos* exceeding a distance of approximately 138 meters. Other than a few stone blocks that Kourouniotis found at the southern end of the hippodrome, no other formal seating facilities for the hippodrome or the stadium have been discovered.

6 Conclusion: A Question of Priority

The Olympics have long been believed to be the earliest Greek athletic festival, and the claim made by the Roman author Pliny the Elder that the first gymnastic contests in Greece were held not at Olympia but at Mt Lykaion has typically been dismissed as inaccurate (*Natural History* 7.205; cf. Pausanias 8.2.1). New excavations at Mt Lykaion, however, have produced evidence that may suggest that Pliny's claim should be taken seriously.

The area in and around Mt Lykaion is linked in Greek mythology to the very earliest periods of Greek history. Pausanias (8.1.4–2.1) tells us that Pelasgos was the first inhabitant of Arcadia and was chosen as king. He introduced huts for the Arcadians to live in, sheep skins to wear, and nuts, specifically acorns, to eat. According to this myth, Pelasgos' son Lykaon founded the city of Lykosoura, which Pausanias describes as the oldest city in the world, and the Lykaion Games.

Until recently there was no archaeological material that supported claims found in myth that there was activity at the sanctuary of Zeus on Mt Lykaion from an early period. Kourouniotis working at the site in the early twentieth century found evidence at the ash altar of Zeus at Mt Lykaion going back no farther than the seventh century, in the form of two miniature bronze tripods (Kourouniotis 1904: 166, figs. 3–4).

The Mt. Lykaion Excavation and Survey Project, however, has produced much evidence that shows that cult activity at the site began at a very early date and went on continuously from at least the Late Bronze Age through to the Classical period. New excavations at the ash altar on the peak of Mt Lykaion have uncovered pottery from the Final Neolithic period (c.4500–c.3000) and all three phases of the Bronze Age (the Early, Middle, and Late Helladic periods, cumulatively covering c.3000–c.1100). Moreover, a shrine dating to the Mycenaean period (i.e., the Late Helladic period, 1600–1100) was found on the bedrock of the mountaintop. The finds from this shrine include hundreds of Mycenaean drinking vessels (kylikes), other open mouth vessels, and terracotta animal and human figurines. There is also a considerable amount of material from all of the post-Bronze Age chronological periods, down through the fourth century (Romano and Voyatzis 2010: 13–14). It is, as a result, now possible to demonstrate that the ash altar at Mt Lykaion was in unbroken use for well over a millennium, and perhaps longer.

These important finds suggest that it is time to reevaluate Pliny's claim that the earliest gymnastic contests in the Greek world were held at Mt Lykaion. We know that sport was a notable part of Mycenaean civilization (see Chapter 2), that there was a significant amount of activity at Mt Lykaion in the Mycenaean period and thereafter, and

that, by the fifth century at the latest, athletic contests were being held on Mt Lykaion. It is, therefore, entirely possible that such contests were held at Mt Lykaion during Mycenaean times, and thus, as Pliny claims, long before athletic contests began at Olympia. There is as yet no direct evidence for athletic activity at Mt Lykaion prior to the fifth century, but miniature bronze tripods, which probably date to the tenth century and which are similar to those excavated at Olympia, have been found in the ash altar at Mt Lykaion. Were these in some way related to athletic competition? We do not yet know.

The sanctuary of Zeus at Mt Lykaion is only 37 kilometers as the eagle flies from the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia. These two sanctuaries have much in common. Both were famous for their ash altars and their athletic contests. The cult of Zeus was introduced at Olympia in the second half of the eleventh century, whereas the new archaeological evidence discussed above suggests that Zeus was worshipped at the ash altar at Mt Lykaion from at least the sixteenth century. The ash altar at Mt Lykaion is literally a mountaintop, sometimes called the Olympos of Arcadia (Pausanias 8.38.2), whereas the ash altar at Olympia is in the form of a conical peak, artificially created, in a river valley and near the sea. The archaeological evidence suggests that Olympia may have been influenced by Mt Lykaion and that the cult of Zeus perhaps first manifested itself there and was then transported to Olympia, complete with an ash altar and athletic contests.

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 On the designation of these festivals as “crown” games, see Chapter 23. The *periodos* games were timed so that they never overlapped. See Miller 2004a: 111–12.
- 3 For a definition of the term “gymnic” and details of the various events, see Chapter 1.
- 4 A footrace for girls was added in the Roman period; see Chapter 36.
- 5 There has been much scholarly debate about the date of the first Pythiad. See Miller 1978 and Mosshammer 1982.
- 6 For a definition of the term *palaistra* and for more on the *gymnasion* at Delphi, see Chapter 19.
- 7 On age-classes at Greek athletic contests, see Chapter 14.
- 8 For further discussion of starting mechanisms in Greek stadia, see Chapter 18.

9 The content of these inscriptions is discussed in Ringwood 1927: 95–7 and described and discussed in Datsouli-Stavridi 1999: 33–6.

10 Four of the victor lists are complete. What seems to be the first in the sequence indicates that, at that particular iteration of the festival, a four-horse chariot race was also held. This race appears only once in the other three complete lists. In addition, the fifth list in the sequence catalogs victors only in the two-horse chariot race, the four-colt chariot race, and the men's *dolichos*. The entirety of this list is preserved, and it is unclear whether a complete list of victors for that iteration of the festival was never inscribed, or whether the program of events was, for reasons unknown, abridged. The following list indicates that the full program of events was held at the next iteration of the festival.

11 In the Roman period, some smaller circuses in the eastern Mediterranean doubled as stadia. See the discussion in Dodge's essay, CHAPTER 38, on sites other than amphitheaters.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For illustrated general overviews of Greek sport, and discussion of most of the games treated here, see Tzachou-Alexandri 1989: 69–96; Miller 2004a: 95–112; or Kyle 2007: 136–49. Valavanis 2004: 162–335 offers a clear and lavishly illustrated treatment of the same subject, though without systematic citation of the relevant scholarly literature. On the program of events at the Panhellenic athletic festivals in the fifth century BCE, see Neumann-Hartmann 2007.

On Delphi and the Pythian Games, see Amandry 1990; Fontenrose 1988; Lehoux, 2007/8; Miller 2004a: 95–112; Morgan 1990: 106–90; Picard 1989; Scott 2010: 41–145; and Valavanis, 2004: 162–267. On the history of the site and games in later periods, see Weir 2004.

On Isthmia and the Isthmian Games, much of the fundamental work has been done by Oscar Broneer and Elizabeth Gebhard. Of particular note are Broneer 1973 and Gebhard 1973, 1989, 1992, 1993a, b, 2002. See also Jackson 1992; Kajava 2002; Miller 2004a: 101–5; Morgan 2002; and Valavanis 2004: 268–303.

On Nemea and the Nemean Games, much of the fundamental work has been done by Stephen Miller. Of particular note are Miller 1988, 1989, 1992, 2001, 2002, 2004a: 105–12. See also Birge, Kraynak, and Miller 1992; Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2005; Lambert 2002; Miller and Bravo 2004; and Valavanis 2004: 304–35.

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CHAPTER 12

Sport and Society in the Greek West

Carla M. Antonaccio

1 Introduction

Starting in the middle of the eighth century, Greeks established a substantial number of new and independent settlements – *poleis*, or city-states – in Sicily and southern Italy (hereafter, the Greek West; see [Map 12.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay).¹ Indeed, in the closing decades of the eighth century BCE,² Greeks founded a new colony in southern Italy or Sicily on average every other year (Osborne 2009: 122). Those colonies had an estimated total population of half a million or more by the fifth century, and many communities became quite wealthy (Morris 2004: 732–3). For example, Syracuse developed into one of the largest and most powerful *poleis* in the Greek world, and Sybaris became renowned for luxury and excess.³

Virtually from the outset the Greek West was a site of almost continual conflict, between Greeks and the indigenous populations of the region, and between the Greek cities themselves. Siris, for instance, was destroyed by the combined forces of Croton, Sybaris, and Metapontion sometime around 570, and in 510 Croton annihilated Sybaris. In addition, the Phoenicians were trading and settling in the western Mediterranean at the same time as the Greeks, and their foundation of Carthage and its expansion in the Archaic period (700–480) resulted in ongoing clashes between western Greeks and Carthaginians.

The Greek West entered a period of marked decline in the fourth century. There was a brief revival under Hieron II of Syracuse in the third century, but thereafter Rome was in charge. This essay, therefore, focuses on the 300 years between the early seventh and

early fourth centuries, the period when the Greek communities of the West were at their most powerful and prosperous. Indeed, the earliest evidence for athletic activity by western Greeks dates to the seventh century, and western Greek participation, particularly at Olympia and Delphi, drops off after the early fourth century when conflict and destruction became acute in the region.

Map 12.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



The wealth and importance of western Greece notwithstanding, the evidence for sport in western Greece is perhaps less plentiful than for some other regions in the Greek world. For instance, relevant inscriptions do not survive in the sort of quantity found in places such as Asia Minor (see Chapters 6 and 24 in this volume). Moreover, archaeological excavations have not focused on uncovering sites of athletic competition and training in the Greek West (Lippolis 2004: 43, 46). On the other hand, we have the *epinikia*, odes written to celebrate athletic victories by poets such as Pindar and Bacchylides (on which see Chapter 4). It is noteworthy that 17 of the 45 surviving *epinikia* composed by Pindar were written for western Greeks (Antonaccio 2007: 265).

Even with these limitations, the body of evidence for western

Greek sport is substantial, and it is impossible in the present context to survey all of it. Thus, this essay concentrates on sport at the sites of Croton and Taras, and the participation of the rulers and elites of Gela, Syracuse, and Akragas (the Deinomenids and Emmenids) in the equestrian competitions at Olympia and Delphi. It must be noted that this simplification of a very complex picture leaves out evidence for important victors from places such as Kamarina and Himera in Sicily and Lokroi Epizephyrioi, Kaulonia, and Rhegion in southern Italy.

2 Sport in the Greek West: Croton

The traditional list of Olympic victors records a victory by Daippos of Croton in boxing in 672. This early victory heralds the more plentiful evidence for western Greek sport in the early sixth century, which in all likelihood reflects a major upward shift in athletic activity that took place all over the Greek world (Christesen 2007).

The *polis* of Croton seems to have played a leading role in the development of sport in the Greek West.⁴ Between 588 and 488, 11 Crotoniate athletes are known to have won 19 Olympic victories, 11 in the short footrace called the *stadion* and 8 in wrestling.⁵ (On the events held at Greek athletic festivals, see Chapter 1). During that time period, sprinters from Croton won the Olympic *stadion* almost as often as all other Greek cities combined. The domination of Croton in the *stadion* at Olympia was such that at one Olympiad the first seven finishers in that race were reportedly all from Croton. This gave rise to a saying: “The last of the Crotoniates was the first of all other Greeks” (Strabo 6.1.12). The Greek historian Timaeus (c.350–c.260) wrote that the people of Croton set up an athletic festival intended to rival the Olympics; it was held at the same time and offered rich prizes in silver (F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 566 F45, cited in Athenaeus 522c). (Other ancient authors claimed that this rival festival was staged not by Croton but by its neighbor and rival, Sybaris.)

Milo, perhaps the single most famous ancient Greek athlete, was a prominent resident of Croton. Milo won 6 Olympic victories in wrestling starting in 540, in addition to 7 victories at the Pythian Games, 10 at the Isthmian Games, and 9 at the Nemean Games. Stories, some more reliable than others, about Milo’s incredible feats of strength circulated widely in the ancient world (Poliakoff 1987: 117–19). Milo’s compatriot Phayllos won three victories at the Pythian

Games (two in pentathlon, one in the *stadion*) and was renowned for his amazing performances in the jumping contest that formed part of the pentathlon (Golden 2004: 131–2).

Various explanations have been proposed for the remarkable florescence of sport in Croton in the century after 588. The Greek geographer and historian Strabo, writing in the first century, stated that there was a belief that “the place contains something that tends to health and bodily vigor . . . accordingly, it had a very large number of Olympic victors” (6.1.12, trans. H. Jones). Strabo also said that “the city is reputed to have cultivated warfare and athletics.” That statement has been developed in modern scholarship, most notably by David Young, who has argued that Croton’s athletic successes were the result of an official program that provided substantial subsidies to talented athletes and rewards for victories at major games (1984: 131–62). Croton was thus able to attract the ancient equivalent of free agent athletes from all over the Greek world. Young highlights the case of Astylos of Croton, who in 488 won two footraces, the *stadion*, and the *diaulos*, at Olympia. He repeated this feat in 484, this time, however, competing for Syracuse. In 480, Astylos, again competing as a Syracusan, won three footraces, the *stadion*, *diaulos*, and *hoplitodromos*, at a single Olympiad, something that did not happen again for three centuries. The Crotoniates responded to Astylos’s defection by tearing down a statue that had been erected in his honor and turning his house into a prison (Pausanias 6.13.1). Young sees this as a case of Croton being outdone at its own game, that is, being outbid for the services of a star athlete.

Young also points to evidence indicating that the Crotoniates would not have been alone in offering lavish incentives to elite athletes. An inscription dated to about 600 and found at Sybaris records the dedication of a tithe of a prize awarded to an Olympic victor (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 35.1053, see Miller 2004a: 179–80 for an English translation). This strongly suggests that Sybaris was rewarding its Olympic victors with large sums of money, a practice that aroused the ire of the sixth-century poet Xenophanes (Fragment 2 West, see Chapter 21) and that was also associated with the sixth-century Athenian lawgiver Solon (see Chapter 10).

Croton was also famed for the skill of its doctors, and some modern-day scholars have argued that Crotoniate doctors were early and unusually effective practitioners of what is today called sports medicine. H. A. Harris noted that the doctor Demokedes of Croton, whose services were in great demand all over the Greek world, married Milo’s daughter and was adept at setting dislocated joints (1979: 112–13; cf. Young 1984: 145–6).

Another possibly relevant factor is the influence of the philosopher

Pythagoras in Croton. Pythagoreans, who seem to have dominated the political life of Croton for much of the second half of the sixth century, were noted for their adherence to a strict dietary regimen. This interest and expertise in nutrition, it has been argued, might well have been adopted by Crotoniate athletes (Pleket 2001: 172). Enzo Lippolis (2004: 40–6) has suggested a connection between the Pythagoreans and a pattern in the events in which Crotoniate athletes competed at Olympia. Between 588 and 548 and between 508 and 488, all known Crotoniate Olympic victors were sprinters. Between 540 and 516, however, all known Crotoniate victors were wrestlers. Lippolis argues that this pattern is the result of the waxing and waning of aristocratic and Pythagorean influence in Croton. It is, however, important to note that the majority of the Crotoniate victories in wrestling between 540 and 516 were won by the extraordinary Milo, which makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions from the patterning of Crotoniate Olympic victories. Moreover, Stephen Miller (2004b: 233) has credited Croton's athletic successes to the existence there of a strong democratic political tradition from an early date. He points to the fact that there are no known Crotoniate Olympic victors in the equestrian events, which were closely associated with rich elites.

Croton's athletic successes came to an abrupt end in 488, when Astylos won the *stadion* at Olympia. There are no known Crotoniate victors after that date in either the Olympics or any of the three other major athletic festivals in the Greek homeland. This sharp break should probably be traced to the gradual political and economic decline in Croton, which fared badly at the hands of hostile neighbors, both indigenous and Greek.

3 Sport in the Greek West: Taras

Croton may well have done much to raise the profile of sport in the Greek West, and there is evidence that sport became an important activity in other western Greek *poleis* in the second half of the sixth century. This is most evident in Taras (frequently known by the Latinate form of its name, Tarentum), where we are fortunate to have a considerable amount of archaeological evidence from hundreds of graves that have been carefully excavated and published.⁶ Tarentine burials take three forms: rectangular cists cut into the earth or bedrock (in some cases with a sarcophagus placed inside the cist); chamber tombs, consisting of built underground rooms typically furnished with funerary couches and sarcophagi; and urn burials,

ceramic jars containing cremation remains and placed in pits dug into earth or rock (Maruggi 1994).

A considerable number of the tombs from Taras from the period between roughly 530 and 475 contain artifacts that reflect a strong interest in sport. (The number of such graves drops off sharply starting in the second quarter of the fifth century.) One of the earliest such tombs is a cist grave that contained more than forty ceramic vessels, including two vases showing boxing matches, one showing a horse race, and one showing a race in armor (*hoplitodromos*) (D'Amicis, Giboni, Lippolis, *et al.* 1997: 158–68). Other tombs contain various types of sport equipment; the earliest example is a cist grave dating to the last quarter of the sixth century with an iron discus placed inside the sarcophagus, along with numerous vases, some featuring sport scenes. Another cist grave, this one dating to the fifth century, contains a strigil (for scraping oil and dust off the skin after exercise), a javelin, and jumping weights (D'Amicis, Giboni, Lippolis, *et al.* 1997: 231–8, 230–1). The excavators have noted that vases with scenes showing chariot races are more common in the more expensive chamber tombs, reflecting the traditional strong connection between wealth and participation in equestrian competition (Lippolis 2004: 48–9). (Equestrian themes also featured prominently in Tarentine coinage (Evans 1889), but this imagery is shared by other *poleis* as well; I discuss Syracuse later in the chapter.)

Perhaps the single most well-known tomb from Taras relevant to this topic is a cist grave with a sarcophagus that dates to c.480. An alabastron, for scented oil, was found in the sarcophagus. Outside the sarcophagus, placed in the corners of the cist, were four Panathenaic amphorae, three of which are extant; one shows a jumper and a discus thrower, another shows a pair of boxers, a third shows a chariot race (D'Amicis, Giboni, Lippolis, *et al.* 1997: 314–16). (Other graves at Taras contain Panathenaic amphorae, though not so many nor so carefully arranged.) There has been considerable debate as to whether the occupant of this tomb won these vases in the Panathenaic Games, at which such vases, filled with olive oil, were given out as prizes. (On Panathenaic amphorae, see Chapter 5.) Some scholars (see, for example, Lo Porto 1967) have argued that the Tarentine individuals buried with Panathenaic vases must have won them in competition at Athens; others (see, for example, Bentz 1998: 97–9; Frel 1992) make the case that in at least some instances these amphorae were purchased, not won. The latter seems more likely, particularly insofar as one of the amphorae from the aforementioned grave has a trademark on its base indicating that it was put up for sale at some point before it was buried. Moreover, pseudo-Panathenaic amphorae (vases of the same shape as those given out at the Panathenaic Games)

are found in some graves in Taras, indicating an interest in purchasing vessels that implied a connection to winning in athletic contests at Athens without actually having done so. Furthermore, Panathenaic amphorae and amphorae of Panathenaic type are found widely distributed in Greek and even non-Greek communities of Italy and Sicily.

However one interprets the presence of Panathenaic amphorae in Tarentine tombs, the decision to feature those amphorae in burials, together with assemblages of sport equipment, is strong evidence for the important role sport played in the lifestyle of citizen males in Taras. Similar finds at other sites make it clear that this was not unique to Taras. For example, excavations in the cemeteries at Metapontion produced 39 bronze strigils, most dating to the fifth century (Prohászka 1998: 797–804), and objects used in sport and vases with sport scenes were found in a number of tombs at Lokroi Epizephyrioi (Milanesio Macri 2004).

It is interesting to note that the date of the graves with sports equipment or vases featuring sport scenes found at Taras coincides with what is known about Tarentine Olympic victors (see the listing in Stampolidis and Tassoulas 2004: 289; for more details about individual victors, see the relevant entries in Moretti 1957). The earliest known Olympic victor from Taras, Anochos, won the *stadion* and *diaulos* in 520. The next two Tarentine victories at Olympia date to 472 and 468. Ikkos of Taras won the pentathlon at Olympia at some point in the fifth century before 440, though precisely when is unknown (Moretti 1957: 103). Ikkos was known for abstaining from sex during training, and, after his competitive career was over, he developed a reputation as the best athletic trainer in the Greek world (Golden 2004: 87). The only other known Olympic victories by Tarentine athletes date to the fourth century (in the years 380, 352, and 336).

The apparent decline in sport at Taras may have been linked to political and economic factors. In 473 Taras suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of a neighboring indigenous group, the Iapygians, after which a more democratic political system was instituted. This may have led to a changed attitude toward sport or toward the deposition of sport-related items in tombs, or both. It is, therefore, impossible to be certain whether sport became less important in Taras after the first quarter of the fifth century or whether there was simply change in burial customs.

4 Gela, Syracuse, and Akragas: The Deinomenids and Emmenids

Tyrants – individuals who usurped power and established one-man rule – first appeared in the Greek world starting in the seventh century. In modern usage, the word “tyrant” denotes a notably unjust, capricious, and often cruel ruler, but not all Greek tyrants fit this bill. In some cases they managed to pass power down to their descendants, but their dynasties tended to be short-lived.⁷

The first known tyrant in western Greece, Panaetios, seized control of the city of Leontini in Sicily at the end of the seventh century, but the great age of tyranny in western Greece was the first half of the fifth century. Two dynasties of tyrants, the Deinomenids and the Emmenids, attained immense power and influence in the cities of Gela, Syracuse, and Akragas (see [Figure 12.1](#) for a family tree). In the early years of the fifth century a certain Hippocrates established himself as tyrant of the city of Gela and, with the help of an able commander named Gelon, son of Deinomenes, brought a considerable fraction of Sicily under his control. After Hippocrates’ death in c.490, Gelon took over his position and continued his expansionist policies. Around 485 Gelon seized control of Syracuse, the largest Greek city in Sicily, and established his seat of power there, while entrusting the rule of Gela to his brother Hieron. Gelon died in 478, and his position passed to Hieron, while control of Gela was given to yet another brother, Polyzalos. After Hieron’s death in 466, a fourth brother, Thrasyboulos, was left in charge, but was soon overthrown by a democratic uprising and forced into exile. (Polyzalos seems to have predeceased Hieron.) These four brothers are collectively known as the Deinomenids (literally, “the sons of Deinomenes”).⁸

Figure 12.1 Family tree of the Deinomenids and Emmenids.



The Sicilian city of Akragas fell under the control of a tyrant named Theron sometime around 485, and he held power until his death in 472. Upon Theron's death, his son took over his position, but the latter was overthrown almost immediately. Theron's brother Xenokrates predeceased him. Theron and Xenokrates were called the Emmenids, a designation that drew on the name of a distant and famous ancestor named Emmenes. The Deinomenids and Emmenids had a cooperative, though sometimes fraught, relationship that was reinforced through intermarriage.

The two Sicilian dynasties made good use of the vast resources at their disposal in projecting their power and status through sport. They spent lavishly on raising and racing horses and competing in the major athletic festivals in the Greek homeland (the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games). The Deinomenids twice won the four-horse chariot race at the Olympics, probably the most prestigious equestrian competition anywhere in the Greek world, as well as celebrated two victories in the Olympic horse race, and two victories in the four-horse chariot race and two victories in the horse race at the Pythian Games. The Emmenids won the four-horse chariot race at the Olympics once and the horse race there twice, as well as three victories in the four-horse chariot race and two victories in the horse

race at the Pythian Games, three victories in the four-horse chariot race at the Isthmian Games, and two victories in the horse race at the Isthmian Games. All 21 of these victories were won between 490 and 468.⁹

The Deinomenids and Emmenids also spent heavily on commemorating their equestrian successes, at home and in the homeland. Pindar wrote four *epinikia* for Hieron (*Olympian* 1 and *Pythian* 1–3). A four-horse racing chariot appears regularly on the obverse of the coins of Gela and Syracuse during the period of Deinomenid domination. Some of the most famous coins issued in the ancient Greek world, the heavy silver coins minted by Syracuse in the second quarter of the fifth century and known as the Demarateion series, feature a four-horse racing chariot (Garraffo 2004). Numerous other Sicilian cities, influenced by the Syracusan examples, used the same device on their own coins.

Figure 12.2 (a) Bronze statue of a charioteer found at Delphi (the “Delphi Charioteer”), c.475BCE. Delphi Archaeological Museum Inv. Nos. 3484, 3520, 3540. *Source*: RaminusFalcon. Used with permission. (b) Marble statue of a charioteer found at Motya in Sicily (the “Motya Charioteer”), c.480–450BCE: Museo Joseph Whitaker, Motya, San Pantaleo, Italy. *Source*: Photograph by Carole King. Used with permission.

(a)



(b)



We hear that Hieron's son Deinomenes erected a bronze statue group at Olympia to celebrate his father's victory in the four-horse chariot race (Pausanias 6.12.1). Few such monuments from antiquity survive, but two that do are closely linked to the Deinomenids' and Emmenids' equestrian achievements. The Delphi Charioteer ([Figure 12.2a](#)), part of a monument that originally included a chariot, four horses, and groom (all of bronze) was probably erected by Polyzalos to celebrate a victory at the Pythian Games c.474 (though some uncertainty about dedicant and date exists; see Chamoux 1955; Rolley 1990; Smith 2007; and Adornato 2008). It is striking that the iconic Delphi Charioteer, one of the few large-scale bronzes from Classical Greece to survive, marks a high point of *western* Greek power and prestige. The marble Charioteer from Motya in western Sicily ([Figure 12.2b](#)) has been identified as a monument erected c.470 by the well-

known charioteer Nikomachos, who won victories for the Emmenids Xenokrates and Theron. If so, the statue would have been carried off as booty to Motya by the Carthaginians following the destruction of Akragas in 405 (Bell 1995; cf. Di Vita 1998: 499–519 for doubts about this identification). In both cases, it must be remembered that the owner of the horses got the victory, and not the charioteer (and Nikomachos was an Athenian hired to drive for the Sicilians).

Before exploring the question of why the Deinomenids and Emmenids were so focused on equestrian competition in the Greek homeland, it is necessary to point out that there were no Panhellenic or even important regional athletic festivals in the Greek West. That is in itself an intriguing phenomenon that has attracted relatively little attention.

One must bear in mind that the communities of the Greek West were founded at a time when the basic institutions of Greek society of the Archaic (700–480) and Classical periods (480–323) were in formation, as was the infrastructure that expressed and enabled them. It has been argued that the western colonies played a key role in shaping many of the political, economic, and cultural innovations that transformed Greece during those periods. The transfer of the alphabet from Phoenicians to Greeks (along with its adaptation to Greek), city planning, monumental architecture, and some aspects of cult (hero cult for founders) may all have flowered first in the Greek West. It is now widely accepted that western Greece should not be regarded as a periphery; sheer distance is not as significant with respect to flows of information in antiquity as it would intuitively seem, especially as networks of trade and communication became more and more dense (Malkin 2011).

As independent city-states, western Greek cities founded their own sanctuaries and held athletic contests in their own territories. The foundation of new cities and new festivals continued into the fifth century. We have already mentioned a local contest established (ostensibly at least) by Croton, and we hear, for example, of the Aitnaia festival created by Hieron in connection with the establishment of the city of Aitna in 476 (Pindar *Olympian* 6.97; Luraghi 1994: 339–41). Athletic contests were held at Taormina (a city not founded until the mid-fourth century), and there was also an annual contest in honor of Zeus Eleutherios at Syracuse from the period after the fall of the Deinomenids (Diodorus Siculus 11.72.2). We have some evidence of games at Metapontion, Neapolis, Sybaris, and Taras (Lippolis 2004: 43; cf. Arnold 1960: 250–1).

Yet, no important regional or Panhellenic sanctuary ever developed in the Greek West, and, as a result, there were no major athletic festivals in this part of the Greek world. (Such festivals were typically

held in sanctuaries; see Chapter 20.) If one recalls that the first western Greek settlements were founded just at the time that important regional sanctuaries (some of which, such as Olympia, later became Panhellenic) were coming into being in other parts of the Greek world, it is reasonable to wonder why the new western Greek communities did not also found a regional and Panhellenic sanctuary (or sanctuaries) of their own.

An answer comes in several parts. To begin with, the mainland sanctuaries that became famous for their athletic contests (Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia, Nemea) were only reaching prominence in the same period that the colonies were themselves being founded, and it is really not surprising that the Greeks who colonized the West invested so much effort in competing at those sanctuaries. The western Greeks would, as all Greek communities did, develop their own infrastructure – placing sanctuaries, cemeteries, houses, public space, and so on according to local conditions and guided by their founders. But they maintained vital connections with the metropoleis that founded them and the territories from which they originated. And although by the later fifth century the Sicilian Greeks would develop a sense of identity as “Sikeliotai” – a group with a shared territory and kinship – they did not have this framework in earlier periods. Rather, they were more defined by their rivalries, their attempts to secure their own territories, and their relations with the preexisting populations. Finally, though Sicily and southern Italy were woven into Greek myths through the tales of heroes such as Herakles and especially the homecomings of heroes who traveled the Mediterranean as they returned from the Trojan War, the kind of mythic and ritual landscape, to say nothing of the Bronze Age past, that conditioned Greek society “at home” in the ancestral territory, was not available to colonial Greeks in their new surroundings.

The presence of western Greeks is particularly evident at Olympia, the site about which we are best informed, and also at Delphi, source of the oracles that anchored many colonial founding narratives. Olympia has even been characterized as a Peloponnesian–West Greek sanctuary (Philipp 1994), a viewpoint that highlights the early and continuing interest western Greeks showed in Olympia. That may seem surprising in view of its distance from Sicily and southern Italy and the expense and difficulty of travel in the ancient world. However, Greeks did much of their long-distance traveling by sea, and both Olympia and Delphi were perhaps *less* difficult to access for westerners than for a distant inhabitant of the Peloponnese. The location of Delphi and Olympia on the sea routes leading from the Greek mainland to the Greek West is a part of this picture as well. Moreover, it now seems likely that individuals or groups from among

the indigenous peoples of Italy were visiting Olympia and Delphi and making dedications, particularly jewelry and weapons, in the ninth and eighth centuries (Antonaccio 2007). The Greeks who founded colonies in southern Italy thus knew an already well-trodden path to the oldest and most prestigious Panhellenic sanctuaries.

Western Greek participation in mainland athletic competitions must be understood against this background. Less than a century after the founding of the first Greek settlements in Sicily and southern Italy, residents of those settlements were competing successfully at Olympia. As noted above, the first known western Greek to triumph at Olympia was Daippos of Croton, who won the boxing contest in 672. Lydgamis of Syracuse won the *pankration* at the Olympics of 648, Philytas of Sybaris the boys' boxing in 616. In the sixth century both the absolute number of western Greek Olympic victors, and the percentage of known Olympic victors from western Greece, increased substantially.

A regular habit of coming together at Olympia had a number of advantages for western Greeks. The use by colonials of Olympia and other sanctuaries like it would have had the advantage of maintaining general links with the source of a colony's Greek identity, while avoiding the kind of close connection with the mother city which might compromise its independence. At the same time, the absence of a shared sanctuary in the West itself also allowed the colonies to interact with each other, but outside colonial, and disputed, territories. Olympia was, in effect, neutral ground for all western Greeks.

Olympia may also have had a particular attraction because it had strong associations with military activity, a crucial part of the lifestyle of western Greeks, owing to the need to defend themselves against their non-Greek neighbors (to say nothing of each other) and to expand at their expense. Olympia, like Delphi, was an oracular site, and was a favored place to consult prior to military expeditions (Parke 1967: 164–93; Sinn 1991).¹⁰ In addition, Olympia was literally crammed with dedications of captured weapons and monuments commemorating military victories. It should come as no surprise then that a series of Sicilian and south Italian dedications of weapons, commemorating military victories, has been recovered from Olympia – dedications made both by *poleis* (e.g., Messina, Rhegion, Lokroi Epizephyrioi) and individuals (e.g., Gelon and Hieron; Scott 2010: 191–2). Military trophies also featured prominently at Delphi; Gelon and Hieron commemorated the victory over Carthage at the Battle of Himera with a dedication of golden tripods. This trophy stood in implicit competition with the bronze serpentine column supporting a golden tripod that was erected at Delphi by the coalition of Greek cities that defeated the Persians at the Battle of Plataia (Scott 2010:

Competitors from western Greece played an important enough role at Olympia that they seem to have influenced the program of events there. Two equestrian events were added to the Olympic program in the early years of the fifth century, the *kalpe* and the *apene*. The *kalpe* was a race for mares in which jockeys dismounted at some point near the end of the race and finished by running alongside their horses; the *apene* was a race involving carts pulled by a pair of mules. Both of these events were particularly popular in the Greek West, and it is significant that three of the four known winners in the Olympic *apene* came from western Greece. These events, then, may well have been added to the Olympic program at the urging of western Greeks (Stampolidis and Tassoulas 2004: 26).¹¹

Western Greeks also left their mark on the architecture of the sanctuary at Olympia. One of the more common types of building found at Greek sanctuaries is the treasury, typically a small structure paid for by a city-state and meant to house expensive, portable dedications. Constructing a treasury at a Panhellenic sanctuary was a way for a community to make its presence felt to large numbers of visitors from all over the Greek world, and many treasuries were highly elaborate buildings that showcased the architectural and artistic traditions of the community that erected them. The treasuries at Olympia, most of which were built between 600 and 450, were constructed in a row on a terrace along the north side of the sanctuary. Of the eleven treasuries that were standing in 450, five were built by western Greek communities (Gela, Metapontion, Selinous, Sybaris, and Syracuse). The sanctuary at Delphi, too, was embellished with treasures constructed by communities all over the Greek world, and even by some non-Greek communities (e.g., the Etruscans). At Delphi, there were many more treasuries, roughly thirty in all, of which perhaps six were dedicated by colonies (Massalia, Sybaris, Syracuse, Cyrene, and Croton). Here again the western Greeks made their mark.¹²

The Deinomenids and Emmenids were passionate about competing in the major athletic festivals on the Greek mainland, then, in no small part because they were heirs to a long tradition of doing so. But the resources and power of these dynasts was unmatched in the Greek world of their time, the early fifth century. Olympia was the ideal place, for all the aforementioned reasons, to project their brilliant status. Such was the prestige reflected on cities and their victors in the Panhellenic contests that Astylos of Croton, whom we have encountered earlier, was persuaded by either Gelon or Hieron, presumably by means of generous financial incentives, to compete in running at Olympia as a Syracusan in the 480s. We have also seen that

they promoted other events in which they excelled, including the *apene*, for inclusion in the games. Though they themselves did not win in these events, their close associates did; for example Hagesias, an Arcadian, who served Hieron and who won in the *apene* in 468. This victory was commemorated in Pindar's *Olympian* 6, which was performed in Arcadia and also in Syracuse – both of Hagesias's homes.

The statues, poems, and feasts both at home and at the sites of competition that celebrated victories all provided an impressive spectacle for those who attended the games and for residents of Gela, Syracuse, and Akragas. The emphasis on equestrian competition and the songs of Pindar and Bacchylides helped to reinforce the sense of these rulers as mythic or heroic beings, something that their foundations of new cities and cults also demonstrated.

5 Conclusion

Western Greeks' success in high-level athletic competitions such as the Olympics rose and fell with their political and economic fortunes. The chronic warfare and dislocations of the later fifth and early fourth century – including the struggles with the Carthaginians – put an end to the prominence of western Greek athletes by the end of the fourth century. There were a few victors in the 220s, but after Syracuse fell to the Romans in 212, there was not a single independent city left in the Greek West. The last known Olympic victory by a western Greek was achieved by Orthon of Syracuse, in the *stadion* race in 148.

Nonetheless, the western Greek athletic tradition lingered on. Sport continued to be an important part of life in western Greece long after the Greek communities of Sicily and southern Italy produced their last Panhellenic victors. From written sources, we know of *gymnasia* in not less than 22 Sicilian cities in the Roman period. As Di Vita notes, the monumental *gymnasion* at Akragas was lavishly rebuilt in the reign of Augustus (2004: 75). Greek games influenced Roman *ludi* from an early period (see Chapters 25 and 36). Direct Roman contact with Greek sport was centered in the Greek communities of southern Italy, and thus it is no accident that Greek-style athletic contests, *Italika Romaia Sebasta Isolympia*, were founded in the western Greek community of Neapolis in 2 BCE, in honor of Augustus. These games claimed a status “equal to the Olympics,” marking a clear end to the independence of Greek sport and of western Greek participation in the ancient contests.

NOTES

1 The area of Greek settlement in southern Italy and Sicily is sometimes referred to as Magna Graecia, but that term technically refers only to Greek colonies in southern Italy. Greeks also founded settlements in places west of Sicily, such as Sardinia and southern France. Those settlements had their own unique history and are not discussed here.

2 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

3 On the historical development of the Greek West, see Antonaccio 2009 and Funke 2006.

4 On sport in Croton, see Lippolis 2004: 40–6 and Young 1984: 134–46.

5 Olympic victories won by western Greeks are listed in Stampolidis and Tassoulas 2004: 288–9 and are analyzed in detail in Giangiulio 1993 and Philipp 1994. There is some uncertainty as to the event in which Philip of Croton won an Olympic victory in 520; boxing is a reasonable supposition.

6 On sport in Taras, see D’Amicis, Giboni, Lippolis, *et al.* 1997 and Lippolis 2004: 46–60.

7 On Greek tyrants, see Stein-Hölkeskamp 2009.

8 For a detailed discussion of the history of Sicily in the sixth and fifth century, see the relevant chapters in volumes 4 and 5 of the latest edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History*. See also Luraghi 1994.

9 The details are as follows:

Deinomenids

Gelon: four-horse chariot race at the Olympic Games (488)

Hieron: four-horse chariot race at the Olympic Games (468); horse race at the Olympic

Games, twice (478, 472); four-horse chariot race at the Pythian Games (470); horse race at the Pythian Games, twice (482, 478)

Polyzalos: four-horse chariot race at the Pythian Games (474?)

Emmenids

Theron: four-horse chariot race at the Olympic Games (476); horse race at the Olympic

Games, twice; four-horse chariot race at the Pythian Games, twice; horse race at the Pythian Games,

twice; four-horse chariot race at the Isthmian Games, twice; horse race at the Nemean Games, twice (all of these victories, other than the four-horse chariot race at the Olympics, were won after 488 and before 476) Xenokrates: four-horse chariot race at the Pythian Games (490), four-horse chariot race at the Isthmian Games (476?)

This list is almost certainly incomplete, particularly for the Deinomenids, because the primary sources of information about their equestrian triumphs are *epinikia*, which were not commissioned for each and every victory. For Theron, we have the benefit of a monument base from Delphi, dated to sometime before 476, that lists all his equestrian victories at the major games. This list also does not include victories by people closely allied with either dynasty, such as Chromios, one of Hieron's most able commanders, who won the four-horse chariot race at the Nemean Games in 477. Many of the details of precisely what victories were won when by the Deinomenids and Emmenids remain the subject of scholarly debate. Key pieces of relevant scholarly literature include Antonaccio 2007; Hornblower 2004: 186–201; Rolley 1990; Vatin 1995–6; and Young 1983. Work on this subject appears with some regularity; see now, for example, Cummins 2009/10 and 2010/11.

10 It is interesting to note that later stories of uncertain reliability suggest that seers from Olympia played an important role in the Greek colonization of Sicily and southern Italy (see Mora 1984).

11 Both events were dropped from the Olympic program in 444.

12 There are unresolved difficulties in identifying the function of some of the structures found in the area where the treasuries were built and in determining which treasuries were built by which communities. On the treasuries at both Delphi and Olympia, see Scott 2010.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For brief introductions to the history of the Greek West in the Archaic and Classical periods, see Antonaccio 2009 and Funke 2006, respectively. For more detailed analysis, see the relevant chapters in volumes 4 and 5 of the latest edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, which contain references to much of the relevant scholarly bibliography. A useful survey of cities in the Greek West can be found in Cerchiai, Jannelli, and Longo 2004. Luraghi 1994 is fundamental on tyrannies in the Greek West. Pugliese Carratelli 1996 is a catalog of a landmark exhibition of art from the Greek West and contains much information about the western Greek cities. Bennett, Paul, Iozzo, *et al.* 2002 and La Regina 2003 are both also helpful sources for western Greek art.

There is as yet no comprehensive study of sport in the Greek West, though see Todisco 1997 for an attempt to synthesize the relevant iconographic, archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence. Much of the important bibliography specifically on sport in the Greek West is in Italian. Noteworthy contributions include, but are no means limited to, Allegro 1976: 604–9 (on an athlete's grave from Himera); D'Amicis, Giboni, Lippolis, *et al.* 1997 (on sport-related materials from the cemeteries at Taras); Giangiulio 1993 (on western Greeks at

Olympia); Lo Porto 1967 (on “athletes’ graves” from Taras) and 1982 (on an athlete’s grave from Metapontion); and Philipp 1994 (on western Greeks at Olympia). Several Italian scholars published essays in English in the volume edited by Stampolidis and Tassoulas in 2004. The volume lists many important sources in its bibliography, and all of the essays can be recommended. The equestrian endeavors of the Deinomenids and Emmenids, and the commemoration of their successes in *epinikia*, continues to attract scholarly attention; see, for instance, Cummins 2009/10 and 2010/11. Excavation reports from individual sites such as Metapontion and Taras (published in various languages) are key sources of information. Moretti 1953, 1957, and 1970 are essential for studying athletic victors and their distribution over space and time. Bell 2005 identifies two statues found in western Greece as victor statues. Nicholson 2005 opened new ways to consider the status of athletes, trainers, jockeys, charioteers, and the aristocracy, drawing heavily on material culture. Finally, Hornblower and Morgan 2007 has many useful essays and resources for further reading.

PART III

People, Settings, Ideas

CHAPTER 13

Sport and Democratization in Ancient Greece (with an Excursus on Athletic Nudity)

Paul Christesen

1 Introduction

Aristotle devotes part of Book Four of the *Politics* to a consideration of how oligarchic groups in ancient Greece went about disempowering other members of their communities. He argues that one means of accomplishing this end was for the wealthy to set up a system in which they were given incentives to attend the assembly, hold magistracies, and participate actively in the legal system, whereas the less well-off received no incentives to do any of these things. Aristotle then goes on to say:

The rich legislate in the same manner about both possessing arms and participating in sport [*gymnazein*]. For it is possible for the less well-off to not possess arms, but the rich not possessing arms are fined. And if the less well-off do not participate in sport, there is no fine, but there is a fine for the rich, so that the rich will, on account of the fine, take part in sport, whereas the less well-off do not because they do not fear a fine. (*Politics* 1297a29–35)¹

It may come as something of a surprise to find Aristotle mentioning sport in the same breath as overtly political institutions such as assemblies and courts. His observations reflect a fact that needs to be kept front and center in our thinking about Greek sport: sport had powerful political ramifications throughout Greek history.

The goal of this essay is to explore one aspect of the sport–politics nexus in ancient Greece: the relationship between sport and

democratization. We will see that sport, by promoting a sense of egalitarianism and unity among the empowered members of democratizing communities, played an important role in consolidating and extending democratization in ancient Greece.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to give brief consideration to terminology, chronology, and evidence. It is difficult to discuss the relationship between sport and democracy in ancient Greece because the term “democracy” resists satisfactory definition. The standard approach is to define “democracy” on the basis of the presence or absence of certain political institutions, such as free and fair elections. However, debate continues about precisely what institutions are constitutive of a democracy, and about whether each such institution is or is not present in any given time or place. (It is, for instance, frequently not obvious whether an election should be understood as having been free and fair.) Moreover, defining democracy solely on the basis of political institutions is problematic because it ignores the important ramifications of nonpolitical forms of inequality.²

The approach adopted here is to focus not on democracy but on democratization, which will be conceptualized in two ways: as either a condition in which the balance between hierarchical and egalitarian relationships in a given situation is tilted strongly toward the latter, or the process that brings such a balance into being, maintains it, or extends it further toward egalitarianism. It is important to bear in mind that democratization as defined here goes well beyond the realm of political institutions. However, the absence of detailed statistical information about ancient Greece makes it difficult to establish the level of societal democratization directly, and so democratization will be tracked primarily through changes in political institutions. Such changes do not represent the only or even the most important form of democratization, but they are, given the available evidence, the most easily documented form of democratization and offer a useful if imperfect proxy for democratization broadly construed.

A second important issue that merits discussion is chronology. The relationship between sport and democratization evolved throughout the course of Greek history, and it would be impossible in the space available here to explore in a satisfactory fashion such a vast stretch of time. We will, therefore, focus on the seventh through the fourth centuries BCE.³ During that time a wave of democratization swept through the Greek world and the practice of sport underwent major changes. The period between 700 and 300, as a result, represents a particularly interesting, important, and illuminating phase of the relationship between sport and democratization in ancient Greece.

A final issue is that, because of the nature of the evidence at our disposal, it is possible to trace in detail the relationship between sport

and democratization in the seventh through fourth centuries in just two Greek communities: Sparta and Athens. That is unfortunate because there were, in the time period under consideration here, several hundred distinct, autonomous political units in the Greek world, each of which had its own, unique sociopolitical history. That said, Sparta and Athens were among the largest and most influential Greek states, and they represented lines of development that played themselves out, to a greater or lesser extent, in a substantial fraction of Greek communities. Thus, while what happened in Sparta and Athens cannot give us a full picture of the relationship between sport and democratization, the course of events in those two communities does offer a good general sense of what was going on throughout the Greek world.

The remainder of this essay is divided into four main sections. The first looks at the trend toward democratizing sociopolitical systems that made itself felt starting around 700. The second contains a discussion of the evolution of Greek sport in the years after 700. The third explores four different mechanisms by means of which sport fostered a sense of egalitarianism and unity among the empowered members of democratizing communities: by serving as a model of and for egalitarian relationships, by promoting meritocratic status competition, by acting as a source of social capital, and by promoting group closure. The final section of this essay deals with athletic nudity and its effect on democratization.

2 Sociopolitical Change

Around 700 the level of democratization in the Greek world was relatively limited, as was the extent of participation in sport. Scholarly debate about the nature of the sociopolitical systems in place in various Greek communities in 700 continues, but there is fairly broad consensus that social and political life in most communities was dominated by men from a comparatively small number of wealthy and powerful families. There was a good deal of sport in the Greek world at that point in time, but it was open primarily to men from those same wealthy and powerful families. Moreover, there was little in the way of formally organized athletic competitions or purpose-built athletic facilities. The Olympics was the only regularly scheduled athletic contest in Greece, and formally organized athletic competitions took place primarily in the context of funeral games for prominent men, and hence were intermittent. Architectural spaces specifically dedicated to sport in the form of facilities for practice and

competition could be found in neither sanctuaries nor cities.⁴

A shift toward more democratized sociopolitical systems began in the seventh century, accelerated in the sixth century, and continued in the fifth and much of the fourth centuries. In communities throughout the Greek world men from less wealthy, but still prosperous, families gradually won social privileges and political power. To follow that process, we need some idea as to the nature of the involved parties.

Starting in the seventh century there were typically three more or less distinct social groups in each Greek community. The dividing lines between these groups were based on economic considerations, but also carried over into matters of lifestyle and politics. *Plousioi* were people from households that were so wealthy and that had enough labor at their disposal from women, slaves, and hired dependents that their adult male members never had to work. Some adult men who were *plousioi* worked anyway, but Greek males placed a high value on having the leisure to pursue interests such as politics and less value on work as a good thing in and of itself. *Penetes* were people from households that were prosperous but not rich enough that their adult males were entirely free from labor. The vast majority of households in all times and places in ancient Greece supported themselves through agriculture, and the climate and topography in most places where Greeks lived was such that farms required intense labor at some times of the year and relatively little at others. Adult men who were *penetes* had to work hard on their farms for part of every year, but also had enough labor at their disposal from women, slaves, and dependents to enjoy a considerable amount of leisure during slack periods. *Ptochoi* were people from households in which the adult male members had to work regularly, typically because they could not afford to buy slaves or hire laborers. The people in this category ranged from farmers who made a decent but not spectacular living to outright beggars (Markle 1985 and Morris 2000: 109–54).

The sociopolitical struggles that began in the seventh century were fought largely between *plousioi* and *penetes*. The *ptochoi* were almost always largely excluded from social and political influence. What we would call elites were thus more or less the *plousioi*, and the nonelites were, for our purposes, mostly the *penetes*. There was not, of course, perfect unanimity among the *plousioi* in any given community, but a community's elites did tend to act together with some frequency in order to defend their collective interests. The *penetes* were initially even less unified than the *plousioi* but gradually developed a sense of being a group with similar priorities.⁵

At the beginning of the seventh century, the *plousioi* in most communities wielded a great deal of social and political influence, but in order to maintain positions of leadership they needed to exhibit a

willingness and ability to serve their communities. That entailed regularly demonstrating both martial prowess and generosity. In the seventh and sixth centuries, *plousioi* in much of the Greek world sought to rewrite this unwritten social contract. During this time period, Greek political and military institutions were becoming increasingly formalized, and *plousioi* began to ground their power in control of those institutions. They also claimed that they came from superior lineages and hence were entitled to inherit without question positions of leadership, and reinforced those claims by seeking to generate social status through conspicuous consumption.

The attempts of the *plousioi* to rewrite the social contract met with active resistance from the *penetes*. The *penetes* probably initially had no aspirations to social or political dominance; the problem was one of incentives. As things stood around 700, *plousioi* legitimized their positions of leadership through showing an active concern for the well-being of other members of the community and thus had a strong motivation to do so. If the *plousioi* could base their power on heredity and conspicuous consumption, they would have little motivation to concern themselves with the welfare of others. That would not have been to the benefit of the *penetes* and was in any case a recipe for a dysfunctional community.

Moreover, military developments shifted the balance of power in favor of the *penetes*. During the seventh century Greek military forces became more organized than they had been previously, and communities began to field unified forces of heavily armed infantrymen, called hoplites, who fought in a tight, rectangular formation called a phalanx.⁶ Phalanxes consisted primarily of *plousioi* and *penetes* because Greek soldiers paid for their own arms and armor, and hoplite equipment was relatively expensive.⁷ *Penetes* could afford this expense, *ptochoi* generally could not. *Ptochoi* served in their community's army, but as lightly armed fighters who were only peripherally attached to the phalanx; in later periods, when some Greek communities developed fleets of oared warships, many *ptochoi* served as rowers. Insofar as *plousioi* had long made claims to power based in part on the fact that they played a particularly important role in the defense of their communities, the increasing military prominence of *penetes* put them on more of an equal footing with the *plousioi*.

The *penetes* responded to the maneuvers of the *plousioi* by overtly rejecting the attempts of the latter to use birth and wealth to set themselves apart. The *penetes* articulated an alternative set of goals and social rules that emphasized cooperation and sacrifice in the interests of the community and the importance of being an ordinary citizen of a well-ordered community.

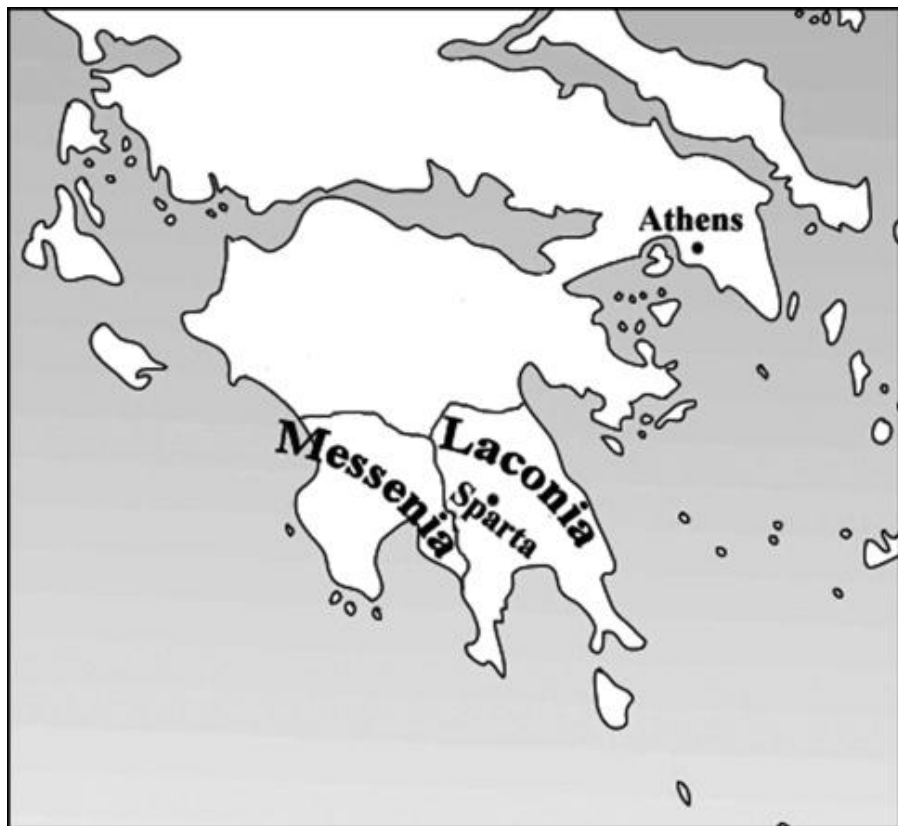
The struggle between *plousioi* and *penetes* was played out on these terms for much of the seventh and sixth centuries in individual communities all over the Greek world. In some communities the *plousioi* won out for a time and established themselves as a hereditary aristocracy; only members of their families could hold magistracies, and they inherited fixed positions on top of their community's social and political hierarchy.

Over the course of time, however, the *penetes* gained the upper hand in most places, and a new and more democratized sociopolitical system gradually took shape in much of the Greek world. The *penetes*, who do not seem to have had grand ambitions in 700, came little by little to expect and demand something approximating social and political equality with the *plousioi*.

That new arrangement resulted in a great deal of democratization in many Greek communities. The *plousioi* probably represented roughly 4–5 percent of the households in any given town, *penetes* 30–50 percent.⁸ The number of men in the dominant group in each town thus became roughly six to ten times larger than it had been. This process of democratization was evident all over the Greek world in the sixth and fifth centuries, but each community was in a sense its own unique case, and the extant sources are such that we can follow it most closely in Sparta and in Athens.

Sparta does not typically figure prominently in modern discussions of ancient Greek democracy, but the wave of democratization that swept through the Greek world starting in the seventh century arrived in Sparta at a relatively early date. Sparta controlled an unusually large territory, as the result of a long campaign of conquest that first gave it control of all of Laconia, the region in which the town of Sparta was located, and then all of Messenia, the region to the west (see [Map 13.1](#)).

Map 13.1 Map of Laconia and Messenia.



Before the seventh century the sociopolitical situation in Sparta seems to have been typical in that social and political power was concentrated in the hands of the local *plousioi*. Change came as the result of a revolt among the conquered Messenians sometime around the middle of the seventh century. Suppressing the revolt required a long and costly war that put immense stress on Spartan society. In the aftermath of that rebellion, Spartan society underwent major changes. Many, perhaps all, of the *penetes* in Sparta were given large land grants in Messenia with attached serfs called helots, who produced enough food and income that the *penetes* no longer needed to work to support themselves. Put another way, Sparta's *penetes* were converted into *plousioi* by exploiting the land and labor of the conquered Messenians.

Roughly contemporaneous changes in Sparta's sociopolitical system effected a good deal of democratization. The sovereign power in the Spartan state was given to an assembly in which all Spartan male citizens, that is, *plousioi* and former *penetes*, could vote. All male citizens also had the right to vote in elections by means of which magistrates were chosen, and could themselves stand for office. Furthermore, Sparta's *penetes* were given the opportunity to compete

on relatively equal terms with *plousioi* in status-generating activities of all kinds. Democratization and the concomitant expansion of egalitarian relationships between what had been the *plousioi* and the *penetes* of Sparta is reflected in the fact that Spartan male citizens called each other *homoioi* (equals).

Despite the impact of the sociopolitical reforms enacted in Sparta, much inequality remained. Sparta had two hereditary kings who wielded considerable power. Families that had been among the *plousioi* before the middle of the seventh century continued to enjoy privileged social and political positions for a long period of time, so that some *homoioi* were, in practice, more equal than others (Hodkinson 2000: 399–445). A substantial fraction of the inhabitants of the Spartan state consisted of people who were enslaved, and women had only limited social privileges and never had any political rights.⁹

Democratization in Athens unfolded at a slower pace than in Sparta, but more fully. For much of the seventh century Athens was dominated by a small hereditary aristocracy called the *Eupatridai* (literally “descendants of good fathers”) and was governed by nine magistrates selected by and from among the *Eupatridai*, and by a council of about three hundred men consisting of former magistrates. Over the course of the sixth century sociopolitical changes initiated a process of democratization. The landmarks in that process were two separate sets of reforms, one instituted by Solon sometime around 590, and a second by Kleisthenes in 508.

The *Eupatridai*, probably driven by fear of a violent revolution, empowered Solon to make whatever changes he believed necessary to quell unrest among the Athenian populace. Solon assigned every family in Athens to one of four property classes based on how much their farm produced, decreed that magistrates would be elected, and made it possible for any man from a family in the top one or two property classes to run for office, regardless of whether or not he was one of the *Eupatridai*. He also gave every male citizen of Athens the right to appeal a magistrate’s decision to a jury drawn from men from all four property classes. Athenian juries as constituted by Solon consisted mostly of men from outside the ranks of the *plousioi* and wielded significant power, and in this way, not just the *penetes* but also the *ptochoi* were given a major share in the operation of Athens’s government.

In 508 another round of reforms, this one overseen by Kleisthenes, gave Athens an array of democratic political institutions. Kleisthenes began by creating 10 new, identically structured political groupings called tribes, and every free adult male resident of the Athenian state was assigned to a tribe. All of these men, and their male descendants,

were citizens. Kleisthenes gave the sovereign power in the Athenian state to an assembly that met 40 times a year and in which all citizens over the age of 20 had the right to vote. On a day-to-day basis Athens was run by a new governing body called the Council of 500, which consisted of 50 men selected from each tribe.

Even in Athens, however, democratization occurred within circumscribed boundaries. *Ptochoi*, who were disenfranchised in most communities, were unusually influential in Athens, in no small part because in the early fifth century Athens built the largest navy in the Greek world, and *ptochoi* manned the fleet. They thus became an irreplaceable part of the Athenian military and could make a good claim to social and political privileges on that basis. However, the property classes set up by Solon continued to operate, and many positions in the Athenian government were open only to wealthier citizens. In addition, established families that were wealthy and powerful before 508 continued for well over a century to occupy influential positions in the Athenian government out of all proportion to their actual numbers. Women remained socially marginalized, and a considerable proportion of the population consisted of slaves who were denied even the most basic rights.¹⁰

3 Changes in Greek Sport

We have seen that sociopolitical privileges and sport participation were both primarily the preserve of elites before 700 and that starting in the seventh century nonelites, more specifically *penetes*, began to win sociopolitical privileges in some Greek communities. Parallel changes in sport began somewhat later, in the early decades of the sixth century (Christesen 2007b). Major new athletic contests were established at Delphi (in 586), Isthmia (580), and Nemea (573). Communities began to found regularly scheduled athletic contests such as the Panathenaia in Athens (566), and the number of such games multiplied rapidly. Comparable changes also took place in architectural provisions for sport. The earliest stadia were built starting around 550; the earliest *gymnasias*, places set aside for everyday athletic training, were founded at roughly the same time. Even venerable Olympia was not immune to change; sometime in the early sixth century it received its first permanent stone architecture in the form of a temple dedicated to Zeus and Hera. This edifice was the start of a major building program that in the succeeding decades brought the construction of numerous treasuries (small buildings for the storage and display of valuable dedications) and the first formal

stadium.¹¹ Furthermore, individuals began to pour resources into highlighting their participation in sport and their athletic successes. Athletic scenes became common on Greek pottery; the absolute number of surviving Athenian black-figure vases with athletic scenes from the first half of the sixth century is dramatically higher than in the preceding half century, as is the percentage of surviving Athenian black-figure vases with athletic scenes.¹² At the same time athletic victors began to pay sculptors to carve statues of them and to hire poets to write *epinikia*, odes that were specially commissioned to celebrate athletic triumphs.¹³

Since sport had been a basic part of the Greek social landscape long before the beginning of the sixth century, these changes are difficult to explain unless they are understood as the result of an expansion of sport participation to a broader segment of the Greek populace than had been the case in the past. A broadening of participation in sport is most immediately obvious in Sparta, where former *penetes* were expected to use their new freedom from labor to undergo as youths long and arduous training to be citizens and soldiers and to serve the Spartan state in those capacities as adults. Regular, mandatory participation in sport figured prominently in that program of training and service. Xenophon (c.430–354), one of our best sources for sport in Sparta, notes that:

Once Lycurgus [a legendary lawgiver believed to have single-handedly designed the Spartan sociopolitical system] realized that those who keep in training develop good skin, firm flesh, and good health from their food, whereas the lazy look bloated, ugly, and weak, he did not overlook this matter either. But although he saw that anyone who trained hard of his own free will appeared to give his body sufficient exercise, he ordered that in the *gymnasion* the oldest man present should take care of everything, so that they never exercised less than the food they consumed required. (*Lakedaimonion Politeia (Constitution of the Spartans* 5.8–9), trans. M. Lipka, slightly modified)

When discussing the regulations of the Spartan army, Xenophon points out that all Spartiates “are ordered by law to take exercise while they are on campaign” and that they do so in the morning and evening prior to eating (*Constitution of the Spartans* 12.5–7). (For a much more detailed discussion of sport in Sparta, see Chapter 9 in this volume.)

Sparta, however, was decidedly unusual because its conquest of Messenia enriched many of its *penetes* so that they could behave like *plousioi*, and for that reason the situation in Athens is more typical and hence more instructive. The extent to which nonelites took part in sport in sixth- and fifth-century Athens has been the subject of

considerable debate, so it is worth reviewing the relevant evidence in some detail.¹⁴ (For an overview of sport in Athens, see Chapter 10.)

Athens made abundant provision for sport, particularly after the democratization effected by the reforms of Kleisthenes in 508. At the end of the sixth century Athens had three separate public *gymnasia* in addition to an unknown number of privately owned *palaistrai*, at a time when there were probably about a thousand adult male *plousioi* in the entire polity.¹⁵ (On *gymnasia* and *palaistrai*, see Chapter 19.) Both the state government of Athens and the local governments of its numerous constituent communities arranged an array of festivals that provided opportunities to participate in athletic competitions. It is particularly noteworthy that a number of athletic contests were founded in Athens soon after Kleisthenes' reforms. In an analysis of Athenian festivals that included competitions, Robin Osborne has observed that there was "perhaps a particularly high frequency of competitive innovations in the 50 years after 510" (1993: 27), and Nick Fisher has shown that "in the years immediately following the establishment of the new tribes [as part of the Kleisthenic reforms] there was undoubtedly a massive expansion in numbers of singers, dancers, and athletes competing" (2011: 187). The fact that there was a major growth in government-sponsored sport competitions in the years immediately after an array of democratic political institutions was established strongly suggests that participation in sport was not limited to a small group of wealthy men.

The textual sources from Athens also attest to regular participation in sport on the part of boys and men from families that were not counted among the *plousioi*. The costs of mounting athletic competitions at festivals were defrayed by having wealthy individuals, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes not, pay for part or all of them. This produced complaints, as is evident in a treatise called the *Constitution of the Athenians* written by an unknown author, typically called the Old Oligarch, around 430. The writer protests that:

The people have spoiled the athletic and musical activities at Athens because they thought them unfitting (they know they can't do them). In the training of dramatic choruses and in providing for athletic contests . . . they know that it is the wealthy who lead the choruses, but the people who are led in them, and it is the wealthy who provide for athletic contests, but the people who are presided over . . . in the games. At least the people think themselves worthy of taking money for singing, running, dancing. (1.13, trans. C. Marchant)

The Old Oligarch's acerbic comments have an obvious satiric element, but they would have been incomprehensible to his contemporaries if

participation in sport was limited to *plousioi*.

Another helpful passage can be found in the writings of Xenophon, which include the following (almost certainly fictional) statement addressed by Socrates to Pericles, to allay the latter's concerns about civil strife tearing Athens apart: "No, no Pericles, don't think the wickedness of the Athenians so utterly past remedy. Don't you see what good discipline they maintain in their fleets, how well they obey the umpires in athletic contests, how they take orders from their chorus trainers as readily as any?" (*Memorabilia* 3.5.18, trans. E. Marchant, slightly modified). This passage is built upon an unspoken assumption of widespread participation in sport; good behavior on the part of a small minority of wealthy elites would hardly have been cause for optimism about the future of the Athenian democratic state.

If, as seems virtually certain, the sixth century saw sport participation expand to a broader segment of the populace than had been the case in the past, the identity of the new athletes becomes a question of considerable interest. Broad swathes of the inhabitants of the Greek world can be immediately eliminated as potential candidates. There is no doubt that, leaving aside initiation rites and the special case of Sparta, Greek females were habitually excluded from sport. (On female participation in sport in ancient Greece, see Chapter 16.) Slaves of both genders represent another substantial group that was debarred from sport participation, not just by social but also by legal barriers. (On the exclusion of slaves from Greek sport, see Chapter 17.)

Once women and slaves are removed from the equation, there are only two possible groups of any size left: free males from families of *penetes* and of *ptochoi*. The dividing line between these two groups was never sharp, and there must have been considerable variation spatially and temporally in regard to who participated in sport. For example, *ptochoi* enjoyed significantly higher standing in Athens than in most other Greek communities, and that may well have been reflected to some degree in sport. That said, the evidence suggests that the sixth-century transformation of Greek sport was the result of sharply increased participation by *penetes* and that *ptochoi* did not take part in sport in large numbers with any regularity.

The sixth-century changes in Greek sport need to be read against the background of contemporary social, political, and military changes. A prominent role in the defense of the community, social and political privileges, and playing sports were in 700 all defining traits of the *plousioi*. As *penetes* became part of hoplite phalanxes and gained social and political privileges, they increasingly enjoyed social standing and social power (the ability to affect the behavior and beliefs of others) that made them similar to if not the precise equals of

plousioi, and it would have been remarkable if the *penetes* had, as part of that process, not eagerly taken up the practice of sport, long the preserve of elites. *Ptochoi*, on the other hand, remained for the most part militarily and politically marginalized, and thus were in a very different position from *penetes* when it came to sport participation.

Changes in military practice, sociopolitical arrangements, and sport thus all proceeded together. This is nicely illustrated in the case of Athens by the fact that in the fifth century (and quite possibly earlier) Athenian cavalymen, hoplites, and archers (but not sailors in the navy) were required to make a yearly contribution toward the maintenance of the shrine of Apollo Lykeios at the Lyceum *gymnasion*.¹⁶ The number of cavalymen and archers in the Athenian army was relatively small, so most of the men making contributions were hoplites. The Lyceum was regularly used for military training exercises, and Apollo Lykeios was a patron deity for the Athenian army. The presence of both hoplites and athletes at a *gymnasion* was not coincidental. Three different groups of men – those who enjoyed social and political privileges, those who served in the hoplite phalanx, and those who regularly participated in sport – were largely identical in regard to their members. All three groups consisted largely of *plousioi* and *penetes*.

Practical considerations relating to opportunity and means must also have played important roles in creating a de facto exclusion of *ptochoi* from sport. Regular participation in sport required a considerable amount of free time, which boys and men from families of *plousioi* and *penetes* had at their disposal for at least some parts of the year, but which was in much shorter supply among the *ptochoi*.

Regular participation in sport was also founded on competence developed through formal training provided by *paidotribai* (athletic coaches), whose fees were within the financial reach of *penetes* but would have stretched the resources of most *ptochoi*. *Paidotribai* seem to have charged roughly 10 to 15 *drachmai* per year per student. Some sense of the relative cost of hiring a *paidotribes* can be had from the facts that bare subsistence food for a family of four cost about half a *drachma* a day and that full equipment for a hoplite soldier cost 75–100 *drachmai*. Most *penetes*, who by definition came from the upper half of the socioeconomic pyramid, would have had no great difficulty in paying for their sons' athletic training, whereas the same sums would have represented a much larger burden for *ptochoi*. Moreover, given the social importance of sport, families of *penetes* would have seen such training as something approximating a necessity.¹⁷ In one of his speeches in Plato's *Crito* (50d), Socrates suggests that Athenian fathers saw giving their sons a proper training in sport and music as a powerful moral obligation. The relationship between wealth and

athletic training is evident in Plato's *Protagoras*, in which the eponymous character discusses the practice of families sending their sons to tutors to learn reading and writing, music, and sport and observes that "this is what people do who are most able; and the most able are the wealthiest. Their sons begin to go to tutors at the earliest age and stop going to them at the latest age" (326c, trans. W. Lamb, slightly modified). (On *paidotribai*, see Chapter 14.)

It should not come as a surprise, then, that Greek hoplites tended to show both familiarity with and interest in sport. For example, when a force of roughly ten thousand Greek hoplites serving as mercenaries was forced to make a fighting withdrawal from the center of the Persian Empire in 401, an undertaking that consumed several months, they entertained themselves on numerous occasions by competing against each other in athletic contests (Xenophon *Anabasis* 1.2.10, 4.8.25, 5.5.6). Most of these men came from families with sufficient resources to pay for hoplite armor, but they were by no means elites in the sense that they came from the very wealthiest families in their respective communities; the sons of those families had little incentive to hire on as mercenaries in foreign campaigns. Most came from among the *penetes* and had been exposed to sport from an early age.

It seems safe, therefore, to conclude that the sixth century saw the extension of the habit of regularly participating in sport to most if not all boys and men from families of *penetes*, in Sparta and Athens, and probably in most other Greek communities as well. That in turn makes it possible to supply some rough numbers for levels of sport participation in the Greek world in the sixth and fifth centuries. *Plousioi* made up roughly 4–5 percent of the total number of households in any given Greek community, *penetes* somewhere between 30 and 50 percent. The entry of *penetes* into sport thus increased the number of regular sport participants between six to ten times. In the specific case of Athens, there were probably something like twenty-five thousand adult male citizens in 500 BCE (out of a total population of around a hundred and seventy-five thousand), which translates to roughly a thousand *plousioi* and ten thousand *penetes*. One can easily see how a shift from having a thousand to eleven thousand regular participants would fundamentally alter the practice of sport in Athens.

4 Sport as a Model of and for Egalitarian Relationships

We have to this point seen that starting in the seventh century Greek communities such as Sparta and Athens experienced a significant amount of democratization and that starting in the sixth century major changes took place in Greek sport, as men from nonelite families began to participate in large numbers. These two developments were clearly linked; as men from families of *penetes* gained sociopolitical privileges, they found themselves in a position to be able to participate in sport. In that sense, democratization in society resulted in democratization in sport, because sociopolitical change opened up an activity that had previously been largely the preserve of a small number of elites. However, sport also had an important effect on society, because, by promoting a sense of egalitarianism and unity among the empowered members of newly democratized communities, it did much to foster democratization in society. There were four separate mechanisms involved, each of which will be examined in turn.

Egalitarian relationships between the *plousioi* and *penetes* in individual Greek communities, were, initially at least, not easily formed. The more inclusive sociopolitical system that came into being in the sixth century, in which *plousioi* and *penetes* were expected to relate to each other in a largely egalitarian fashion, was the result of a long and difficult struggle. *Plousioi* had sought to create hierarchical relationships between themselves and all other members of their communities, *penetes* included, so the expectation of egalitarian interactions between *plousioi* and *penetes* was not necessarily easily realized. There was in addition a simple problem with numbers. The size of the group of men that enjoyed full social and political privileges in any given community became roughly six to ten times larger than it had been, and that in and of itself created difficulties in forming networks of egalitarian relationships among the members of that group.

Sport participation helped promote the creation of the requisite egalitarian relationships between *plousioi* and *penetes*, and hence helped promote democratization, by serving as a model of and for such relationships. In order to understand how sport modeled egalitarian relationships, it is helpful to think of sport as a ritualized activity. Use of the term “ritualized activity” typically carries the explicit or implicit assumption that almost any activity can potentially take on the qualities of a ritual to a greater or lesser extent. An extraordinarily wide range of activities has been characterized as ritualized, and numerous attempts have been made to find commonalities shared by all ritualized activities. Perhaps the most productive approach to establishing suitable parameters for separating ritualized from nonritualized activities is that outlined by Catherine

Bell. She argues that ritualized activities must have an element of performance (i.e., they must involve participants doing something or acting something out) and are distinguished from other activities not so much by their content as by being contrasted with more mundane actions and by being framed as different and special ways of acting (1992: 37–168 and *passim*).

It requires no great intuitive leap to see that sport can easily become a ritualized activity. Sport is inherently performative and is framed as being set apart and different. Johan Huizinga, in his famous *Homo Ludens*, characterized sport as a form of play and defined play as a “free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life” (1950 (1938): 13). If other considerations, such as the provision of special playing fields and uniforms (or, in this case, nudity), are taken into account, the identification of sport as at least a potentially ritualized activity becomes almost an inevitability. The ritualized dimension of sport is reflected in the regularity with which it is compared to religion.¹⁸

Ritualized activities are “flexible forms of symbolic activity that reaffirm cultural values and a sense of order” (Bell 2005: 7849). As such, they can serve as models of and for certain kinds of social relationships. As models of society, ritualized activities have the capacity to present idealized and simplified visions of how society and relations between individuals could or should be.¹⁹ The anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously described cockfights staged by the inhabitants of Bali as “a story they tell themselves about themselves” (1973: 448). The fact that ritualized activities are by definition set apart from everyday life is particularly significant, as they are for this reason immune to many of the mundane necessities of existence that otherwise can generate a divergence between the normative and normal. As a result, ritualized activities frequently, perhaps typically, reflect social norms with a degree of faithfulness that is otherwise difficult to achieve.²⁰

Greek sport can be understood as presenting a paradigm of *plousioi* and *penetes* interacting as equals. Sport was an activity set apart from everyday life and offered a figurative level playing field that strongly muted status differences based on factors such as lineage and wealth that were prominent in other contexts. To the extent that there were status differences among participants, they were largely the product of demonstrated competence at sport. Moreover, the mere willingness of two men to compete against each other in sport was an implicit statement of their relative equality. Sport thus provided a particularly clear model of what egalitarian relationships between *plousioi* and *penetes* might look like.

The impact of the egalitarian relationships embodied in sport was

greatly amplified by the fact that they also served as a model *for* behavior in other social contexts. The power of ritualized activities to shape behavior is greatly enhanced through performance. The participants in ritualized activities do not simply hear about societal norms, they themselves enact those norms. As Geertz put it, “In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world” (1973: 112). Performance constitutes an essential bridge between ritual activities serving as models of social norms and as models for actual behavior because participants reproduce idealized forms of behavior they are expected to manifest in some form in their daily lives.

The behavior enacted in ritualized activities teaches habits and dispositions that shape the actions of individuals in all settings and thus serves as a model for activity outside the ritualized sphere. Bell has argued that regular participation in ritualized activities physically inculcates the thought and behavioral patterns underpinning such activities and that “as bodies . . . absorb the logic of spaces and temporal events, they then project these structural schemes, reproducing liturgical arrangements out of their own ‘sense’ of the fitness of things.”²¹

The influence of the model of egalitarian relationships provided by sport on behavior in other contexts was particularly strong because of the identity of the participants. Democratization resulted in a sociopolitical system in which *plousioi* and *penetes* were expected to interact as relative equals. Most *plousioi* and *penetes* participated in sport, and so the people involved in egalitarian relationships in sport were exactly the same as those who were expected to form egalitarian relationships in other contexts, an overlap that made the transfer of behavioral patterns from one to the other a much more straightforward proposition.

5 Sport as an Arena of Meritocratic Status Competition

The drawing of a connection between meritocratic status competition and democratization requires some justification, because meritocratic competition can have the effect of undercutting the very egalitarianism that lies at the heart of democratization. Meritocratic systems have the potential to inhibit democratization because they stress equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. A

purely merit-based approach entails giving the largest possible number of individuals equal chances to compete to become unequal. The immediate rewards go to the winners of such competitions, and, as more merit-based competition takes place, more inequality is generated. Furthermore, perfect equality of opportunity is an unrealizable ideal, and merit-based competition can reproduce or extend extant social inequalities by assigning rewards based on the results of competitions in which some individuals have advantages accruing directly or indirectly from factors, such as inherited wealth, that have nothing to do with talent or motivation.

Sport can impede democratization because it is an arena for meritocratic competition that invariably creates status differences between winners and losers. As the sport sociologist John Hargreaves has noted, “sport approximates more to the ideal of a meritocratic social order than any other sphere of social life” (1986: 111). When sport participants compete against each other, the rewards of success are differentially distributed, which creates inequalities.

Nonetheless, meritocratic competition in sport promoted egalitarian relationships among the *plousioi* and *penetes*, and hence democratization, because status hierarchies based on success in sports competitions did not necessarily align with those based on lineage and wealth, which in turn reduced net inequalities. One of the ways sport contributed to democratization in ancient Greece was that it offered a form of meritocratic competition that assigned status in ways that cut across and diminished the importance of distinctions based on lineage and wealth. During the seventh and sixth centuries, *plousioi* had sought to tie social status to lineage and wealth, and those traits always remained important sources of power and privilege, even in the most democratized communities. Sport represented an alternative, nonheritable source of status and social power. The continuing importance of sport as a source of social status in later periods is perhaps most evident from the facts that in the fifth century a limited number of great athletes literally became objects of worship and that athletic success throughout Greek history could serve as a springboard to a political career (see Chapter 20 as well as Kurke 1993 and van Nijf 2001). On a more mundane basis, sport shaped everyday relationships between males from families of *plousioi* and *penetes*; most of them played sports with some regularity, and it was an important means of determining relative standing. The nature of the relationship between two individuals could be profoundly affected by the outcome of their competitive interaction on the playing field, regardless of their relative standing in other social spheres. The leveling potential of athletic competition is evident in the comment of Alexander the Great to the effect that he would enter a footrace at the Olympic Games

when he had other kings as competitors (Plutarch *Alexander* 4.10).

The importance of the equalizing capacity of sport was amplified by the fact that it was impossible to transfer athletic skill reliably from one generation to the next, as opposed to lineage and wealth, which were entirely heritable. The relative stability of distinctions based on lineage and wealth made it feasible for families to accumulate on a gradual basis social power in amounts sufficient to create relatively steep social pyramids. The sharp differentials in athletic ability within and among generations of families pushed in the other direction, and, by introducing an element of instability, acted as a check on the formation of steep social pyramids.

6 Sport as a Source of Social Capital

To explore the relationship between sport, social capital, and democratization in ancient Greece, we must begin with a definition of the term “social capital” and distinguish between origins, substance, and effects.²² Social capital originates in repeated and cooperative interactions, which frequently focus on achieving a shared goal, between people of similar social standing. The substance of social capital consists of interpersonal networks built around egalitarian relationships. The formation of social capital has the effect of promoting solidarity, cooperative collective action, and consensus among the members of a network.

One of the most important developments in sport sociology in the past two decades has been the appearance of a significant body of scholarship that leaves no doubt that sport can be a crucial source of social capital. To give but one example of a substantial collection of work, in 2006 Ørnulf Seippel published the results of a study of the relationship between sport and social capital among members of sports clubs in Norway. Seippel found that “the analyses support previous studies and confirm that being a member of voluntary organizations in general . . . but also sport organizations in particular, has a positive effect on certain kinds of general social trust and some political attitudes and activity” (2006: 178). The data and his analysis of that data led him to conclude that sport was indeed a source of social capital.

The relationship between sport and social capital ties into an exploration of sport as a democratizing force in ancient Greece because social capital can play a pivotal role in creating and

sustaining democratization. The roots of recent scholarly work on this subject stretch back to Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835–40), in which Tocqueville argued that the “habits of the heart” that sustained American democracy were nurtured in a wide array of voluntary associations that helped create a participatory culture and egalitarian relationships. In the past twenty years Robert Putnam has carried out a seminal series of studies that has demonstrated that social capital helps ensure the smooth functioning of democratic political institutions. Putnam also pointed to sport as a particularly important source of social capital.²³

The insight that bonds of friendship formed through sport can have strong political ramifications goes back, as so much else, to Plato. As David and Richard Ned Lebow put it, Plato believed that “at the personal, society, and interstate levels, cooperative relationships are created and sustained through a dense network of social interaction and reciprocal obligations that build common identities along with mutual respect and affection” (Lebow and Lebow forthcoming). Plato saw those interactions as taking place in a variety of different social and political contexts, including sport. Pausanias, one of the characters in Plato's *Symposium*, argues that:

The Persian empire is absolute; that is why it condemns erotic attachments as well as philosophy and sport. It is no good for rulers if the people they rule cherish ambitions for themselves or form strong bonds of friendship with one another. That these are precisely the effects of philosophy, sport, and especially of erotic attachments is a lesson the tyrants of Athens learned directly from their own experience. (182b–c, trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, slightly modified)

The recent scholarship that demonstrates sport to be an important source of social capital, and social capital to be an important factor in democratic societies, thus extends and reinforces ideas with strong roots in ancient Greece.

The conclusion to be drawn from the preceding discussion is clear: the social capital formed in sport can be an important wellspring of democratization. More than anything else this is because social capital formation in sport involves the creation of social networks built around egalitarian relationships. When democratization is understood as a process involving a shift in the balance between egalitarian and hierarchical relationships toward the former, the capacity of sport to facilitate the growth of social capital and hence the growth of egalitarian relationships means that sport has a corresponding capacity to facilitate democratization. This relationship between sport, social capital, and democratization was operative in ancient Greece,

and continues to hold true today.

7 Sport and Group Closure

The history of democratization can be seen as a story of exclusion retreating before successive waves of change that bring progressively greater levels of inclusion. As John Dunn put it in an account of the history of democracy, from ancient to modern times, “Democracy’s triumph has been the collapse of one exclusion after another, in ever-greater indignity, with the collapse of the exclusion of women, the most recent, hastiest, and most abashed of all” (2005: 136).

The history of democratization could, however, also be told the other way around and treated as the story of the forms of exclusion that accompany and enable broadened inclusion. If inclusion is understood as involving membership in a group with some degree of coherence, inclusion and exclusion are inextricably linked. Groups achieve coherence in part through closure, the maintenance of boundaries that separate them from others, and hence through exclusion (Giddens 2006: 496). The significant expansion of a group is likely to entail the construction of new boundaries, so that inclusion necessitates exclusion.

One of the more unusual aspects of the relationship between sport and democratization in ancient Greece is that sport promoted democratization by serving as a means of social exclusion that helped create a clear boundary around newly formed dominant groups consisting of *plousioi* and *penetes*. The more inclusive vision involving the sharing of social and political privileges between *plousioi* and *penetes* took root in part because the *plousioi* and *penetes* in most communities came together to form a single, coherent group that maintained relatively egalitarian relationships among its members. That coherence was achieved in no small measure through the construction of boundaries that separated males born into families of *plousioi* and *penetes* from other members of their communities.

Sport contributed significantly to group closure among *plousioi* and *penetes*. In some sense this can be understood in very simple terms, as part of the process of the formation of social capital, in which the creation of in-group loyalties that comes with the growth of social capital can be accompanied by a sharpened sense of difference with out-groups. In addition, sport can be seen as part of a distinctive lifestyle that helps define a particular group: most *plousioi* and *penetes* regularly participated in sport; most other people in their communities did not.

8 Athletic Nudity and Democratization

One unique feature of Greek sport that greatly magnified its ability to create boundaries was nudity. Sociologists and social psychologists who study group formation have found that membership is frequently linked to clothing; a distinctive, shared style of dress helps bind group members together (see, for instance, Worchel and Coutant 2001: 466). In the case of ancient Greece, however, it was not clothing but its absence that was important.

The custom of athletic nudity was a relatively late arrival; Greeks did not begin exercising in the nude until the seventh century. Throughout the Bronze Age (c.3000–c.1100) and Early Iron Age (c.1100–c.700), Greeks played sports but always did so wearing at least some clothing. This is most evident in the Homeric poems, where men invariably compete wearing a loincloth (see, for instance, *Iliad* 23.710). The only exceptions came in the context of footraces held as part of initiation rites, the participants in which sometimes wore an exotic outfit or went nude (Bonfante 1989: 553 and *passim*; cf. Leitaio 1995). Those occasions were, however, by definition unusual and very far from being something that happened every day. The relevant literary, artistic, and archaeological evidence shows that by the middle of the sixth century it had become standard practice for Greek men to do all their sports, other than equestrian events, in the nude. The beginnings of athletic nudity cannot be dated more precisely than somewhere between roughly 700 and 575, and it is in any case likely that it took a good deal of time for this custom, which represented a radical innovation, to become widely accepted (Christesen 2007a: 353–9; McDonnell 1991). (On sport in Bronze-Age Greece, see Chapter 2; on sport in the Homeric poems, see Chapter 3.)

The habit of stripping down completely for exercise rapidly became something that set the Greeks apart from all of the neighboring cultures in the Mediterranean basin, and it was seen as one of the defining elements that made Greek culture unique. For instance, in Plato's *Republic*, one of the speakers proposes that women training for leadership roles in the ideal state should play sports and should do so in the nude. The speaker then adds, "We will ask the critics to drop their usual practice and to be serious for once, and remind them that it was not so long ago that the Greeks thought – as most non-Greeks still think – that it was shocking and ridiculous for men to be seen naked" (452c, trans. D. Lee, slightly modified).

Even among Greeks athletic nudity represented a distinctly

anomalous practice, and throughout their history Greeks had a strong distaste for public nudity. Sport was the only exception to the general rule that to be nude in public was a form of humiliation. Spartans seem to have had an unusually relaxed attitude toward nudity but, as Ephraim David has pointed out, “for all its importance, the practice of nudity in Sparta should be kept in its proper perspective: this was not a nudist society. In most public contexts the Spartans, like the other Greeks, were dressed and . . . they were extremely careful about their dress.”²⁴ Furthermore, athletic nudity remained a source of some discomfort, as is evident from the design of *palaistrai* and *gymnasia*, both of which used walls to shield their users from outside view. (For more on *palaistrai* and *gymnasia*, see Chapter 19.)

Strange as it may seem, Greeks of later periods knew very little about why and how athletic nudity became a widespread custom. A key problem was that the practice of writing careful historical accounts was pioneered by the Greeks, but not until the fifth century, by which time the origins of athletic nudity were largely lost in the mists of time. There was some agreement that the Spartans had something to do with it, but that was about it. Greeks did, however, show notable ingenuity in inventing explanations for it. For example, some people speculated that a runner had tripped over his loincloth and died during a race, and that athletes thereafter took to nudity for safety reasons.²⁵ It is, as a result, difficult to reconstruct the origins of athletic nudity or to explain the reasons for its persistence, but it is possible to say something about its effects with respect to democratization, in part because Thucydides seems to have been exceptionally well informed about this matter.

Most of Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War (431–404) focuses on his own time, but he does provide a little background in order to prove that the war about which he was writing was the biggest one ever fought by Greeks. As part of that background he mentions Sparta and provides this information:

The Spartans were the first to adopt the moderate manner of dressing that is now the standard custom, and with respect to all other things the richer citizens conducted themselves in a fashion that as much as possible put them into an equal position with the general populace. The Spartans were the first to strip naked and to disrobe openly and anoint themselves with oil after playing sports in the nude [*gymnazein*]. Formerly, even in the Olympic Games, the athletes who contended wore loincloths; and it is but a few years since that practice ceased. And even now among non-Greeks, especially among those in Asia Minor, who hold contests in boxing and wrestling, the competitors still wear loincloths.²⁶

The account provided by Thucydides indicates that athletic nudity was connected to democratization in Sparta. Immediately after commenting that it was in Sparta that the rich first adopted a relatively simple lifestyle that put them on an equal footing with the other members of their community, he observes that the Spartans were the first to play sports in the nude. This implies that there was some connection between athletic nudity and democratization, but Thucydides did not make the nature of that connection explicit. In order to understand what he was getting at, we need to recall that the *plousioi* had used conspicuous consumption, which included dressing elaborately, to try to create status differentials between themselves and others. Democratization in Sparta and elsewhere was accompanied by the imposition of social and in some cases legal constraints on conspicuous consumption.²⁷ Thucydides strongly implies, though he does not explicitly claim, that athletic nudity was part of the same process and that playing sports in the nude reduced social inequalities in Sparta.²⁸ His interpretive instincts were undoubtedly sound on this point; as modern-day sociologists have discovered, “the wearing of special clothing, or little clothing at all, tends to mask social differences and buttresses the impression of harmony and lack of social division” (Hargreaves 1986: 169).

Although this subject is not addressed by Thucydides, the introduction of athletic nudity also promoted group closure by giving *plousioi* and *penetes* an unusual uniform that set them apart from all other members of their communities. We have already seen that nudity was highly exceptional in ancient Greece, which meant that the men who adopted the practice of athletic nudity took up a custom that visibly distinguished them.

Athletic nudity also contributed to group closure by helping limit sport participation by free but not affluent men, the *ptochoi*. The extent to which *ptochoi* would participate in the process of democratization was an open question. Athens gradually moved toward a political system in which *ptochoi* exercised a good deal of influence, but in most Greek communities they remained socially and politically marginalized straight through the fourth century. Although that clearly had a dampening effect on overall societal democratization, it did serve to consolidate the democratization effected by the extension of social and political privilege to *penetes* by restricting the size and heterogeneity of the emergent dominant groups in individual Greek communities and thereby facilitating the formation of stable egalitarian relationships between the members of those groups.

The extension of political and social privileges to the *ptochoi* was in

the interests of neither the *plousioi* nor the *penetes*, and they took active, and largely effective, steps to prevent that from happening. In some communities *ptochoi* were excluded from political rights through the imposition of property qualifications (Johnstone 2011: 99–102). However, the effectiveness of legal restrictions of this sort was limited because the privileges at stake were as much social as political, and it was difficult to legislate lifestyles. The *plousioi* and *penetes* needed means of excluding the *ptochoi* socially.

Sport in general and athletic nudity in particular were important means by which *plousioi* and *penetes* ensured the continuing marginalization of *ptochoi*. We have already seen that the combination of the practical necessities of free time and training and of the restricted resources at their disposal meant that it was difficult for *ptochoi* to participate regularly in sport. As Veblen (1912: 35–67) noted in his acerbic comments on early twentieth-century CE America, leisure activities, because they are economically unproductive, can be an important form of conspicuous consumption. This was certainly true in Greece, where sport was a form of conspicuous consumption that *plousioi* and *penetes* could afford, and *ptochoi* for the most part could not. Sport was, therefore, a convenient means of social exclusion.

Athletic nudity reinforced the exclusionary capacity of sport because it made socioeconomic status apparent in bodily appearance. Regularly exercising in the nude gave athletes a smooth, all-over tan that was unique, because there were no other acceptable contexts for being fully nude on a regular basis. Men from poorer families typically spent much of their time outside working on farms while wearing a short tunic and as a result had the ancient equivalent of a “farmer’s tan.” Alternatively they worked indoors, as craftsmen, and hence were notably pale. These men could come to the *gymnasion* to exercise, but they had to strip down and in doing so immediately made their socioeconomic status evident to everyone present. That would have acted as a powerful deterrent that kept poorer men from participating in sport. It is probably not coincidental that there were specific Greek words for “white rumped” (*leukopygos* or *leukoproktos*) and “dark bottomed” (*melampygos*) and that the first meant “cowardly and unmanly” and the second “brave like Herakles.”

The multiple dimensions of athletic nudity all contributed meaningfully to the formation of egalitarian relationships between *plousioi* and *penetes*. It removed a status marker associated with wealth and thereby helped establish egalitarianism among athletes, and it also promoted group closure by marking out men from families of *plousioi* and *penetes* and by helping to restrict sport participation by *ptochoi*.

9 Conclusion

As we saw at the beginning of this essay, Aristotle understood sport as an activity that had powerful political ramifications; would-be oligarchs sought to encourage sport participation among the wealthy and to discourage it among the other members of their communities. The preceding exploration of the relationship between democratization and sport has shown that those would-be oligarchs had good reason for acting as they did.

Sport played an important role in consolidating and extending democratization in ancient Greece because it promoted a sense of egalitarianism and unity among the empowered members of democratizing communities. It did so in a number of different ways. Sport served as a model of and for egalitarian relationships among *plousioi* and *penetes*. It promoted meritocratic status competition that helped ensure a relatively high degree of egalitarianism among *plousioi* and *penetes*. It acted as a source of social capital and thereby helped build cooperative social networks characterized by egalitarian relationships that bound together *plousioi* and *penetes*. It helped construct a boundary that separated *plousioi* and *penetes* from other members of their communities and thereby helped empowered individuals in newly democratized communities see themselves as members of unified groups. The custom of playing sports in the nude, which appeared in the seventh and sixth centuries, precisely the time that sociopolitical systems and sport were undergoing profound changes, also contributed to democratization. Athletic nudity promoted egalitarianism among sport participants and enhanced the capacity of sport to unify groups of *plousioi* and *penetes* by giving them a special “uniform” only they wore with any regularity.

One must always bear in mind that there was a dark side to the tale of sport and democratization in ancient Greece, because, while sport helped build egalitarian, unified groups of *plousioi* and *penetes*, it also contributed meaningfully to the social and political exclusion of other members of Greek communities, most notably *ptochoi*. One of the paradoxes of democratization is that the expansion of power and privilege to broader segments of a society is frequently, perhaps inevitably, accompanied by a heightened sense of difference between the newly enlarged group of the empowered on the one hand and the other members of their communities on the other. Plutarch quotes a saying to the effect that “there is nothing to match either the freedom of the free man at Sparta or the slavery of the slave” (*Lycurgus* 28.5); at the same time that male *ptochoi* were experiencing an unusual degree of empowerment in Athens, Athenian women seem to have been losing social power and to have ended up with less in the way of

social and political rights and privileges than women in many other Greek communities (Jameson 1997).

We can and should be troubled by the presence of large numbers of slaves in the Greek world, and the way women and the poor were treated. However, compared to other, contemporary societies in the Mediterranean basin, Greek communities represented bold, path-breaking experiments in democratization. The story of democratization in ancient Greece remained unfinished, but that is also true of the modern world. While many societies in the present day are significantly more democratized than any ancient Greek community, there is no society that is not marked by continuing inequalities.

Although in hindsight the imperfect but still impressive democratization movement that swept through the Greek world in the seventh through fourth centuries may seem inevitable, there was always strong resistance to democratization. Furthermore, the changes set in motion by the Macedonian conquest of Greece and much of the eastern Mediterranean starting in the 330s and 320s reversed much of the democratization that had occurred in the preceding centuries.

The role of sport in solidifying innovative, democratizing sociopolitical arrangements probably outweighed its role in limiting the number of people who benefited from those arrangements. The fact that the increasing empowerment of African-Americans and of women in the United States in the twentieth century was accompanied by their growing participation in sport suggests that the capacity of sport to contribute to societal democratization continues into the present day.

NOTES

- 1 On the translation of *gymnazein*, see Christesen 2002. The discussion that follows draws heavily throughout on Christesen forthcoming, which discusses these issues at much greater length and in more detail. What follows here does not purport to be a complete examination of all the ways in which sport is influenced by and influences societal democratization. Of the three basic elements in sport practice – participation, organization, and spectatorship – the focus here is squarely on participation. Participation has the most powerful and direct effect on shaping behavior, not least because democratization requires active participation by the members of a society in shaping their own lives.

- 2 On definitions of democracy, see Dunn 2005: 13–22 and Grugel 2002: 1–31.
- 3 All dates in the remainder of this essay are BCE, unless otherwise indicated.
- 4 On sport and society in Greece around 700, see the discussion in Christesen 2012b: 119–34 and the sources cited therein. For detailed discussion of sport in Greece around and before 700, see Chapter 3 in this volume.
- 5 On the sociopolitical history of Greece during the period under consideration here, see Christesen 2012b: 135–45 and the sources cited therein.
- 6 On the history of warfare in ancient Greece, see the articles in Sabin, van Wees, and Whitby 2007.
- 7 On the cost of hoplite equipment, see van Wees 2004: 47–60.
- 8 On the relative numbers in different segments of Greek communities, see Davies 1967, 1984 and Ober 1996. Estimates of the percentage of adult males in Greek communities that served as hoplites are also relevant. On that issue, see van Wees 2004: 47–60.
- 9 Some ancient sources and much modern scholarship characterize Spartan women as enjoying considerable economic and social privileges, at least relative to other Greek women. This characterization is less well founded than it might seem. For an up-to-date discussion of what is known about Spartan women, see Millender forthcoming.
- 10 On the influence of naval developments on the political history of Athens, see Raaflaub 2007. On the continuing influence of rich families, see Davies 1984 and Connor 1992 (1971). On groups that experienced social and political exclusion in democratic Athens, see Patterson 2007.
- 11 On the architectural history of Olympia in the sixth century, see Mallwitz 1972, 1988 and Scott 2010.
- 12 On trends in the depiction of athletes in Greek vase painting, see Goossens and Thielemans 1996; Hollein 1988: 71–103; and Legakis 1977.
- 13 On athletic victor statues, see Kurke 1993: 141–9 and Lattimore 1988. See Golden 1998: 74–88 for a brief history of *epinikia*.
- 14 The idea that sport remained the preserve of a small elite has been repeatedly argued by David Pritchard. See, for instance, Pritchard 2003, 2004, 2009. The view adopted here, that participation in sport was relatively widespread in Athens in the fifth century, has been well articulated before, most notably by Nick Fisher. See Fisher 1998, 2009, 2011.

- 15 The population of ancient Athens at any given point in time can only be estimated within broad limits (see Hansen 2006).
- 16 This is known from an inscription, *Inscriptiones Graecae* I3 138, which is discussed in detail in Jameson 1980.
- 17 On the cost of hiring a *paidotribes*, see Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 584c and Marrou 1956 (1948): 146. On the cost of living in ancient Athens, see Markle 1985.
- 18 On the overlaps between sport and religion, see the articles collected in Hoffman 1992 and Prebish 1993.
- 19 This is a close paraphrase taken from the excellent discussion of ritual found at Kowalzig 2007: 34.
- 20 A brief introduction to ritual theory can be found in Bell 2005. For a more detailed overview, see Bell 1997. The view of rituals as models of and for society is elucidated in Geertz 1973: 87–125.
- 21 Bell 2005: 7853. For a full discussion, see Bell 1992: 94–117.
- 22 This useful approach to thinking about social capital is taken from Adler and Kwon 2002. There are, technically speaking, three different kinds of social capital: bonding, bridging, and linking. The discussion here centers on bonding capital, the kind of social capital most closely associated with sport. On social capital, and social capital and sport, see Christesen 2012b: 66–78.
- 23 See in particular Putnam 2000.
- 24 David 2010: 152. David also points out that public nudity was typically humiliating in Sparta and was used as a form of social exclusion (149–52).
- 25 This tradition is recorded in scholia B and T to *Iliad* 23.683, on which see Erbse 1969.
- 26 Cf. Xenophon’s observation that Spartiates “adorn themselves not with costly dress but with the fine condition of their bodies” (*Constitution of the Spartans* 7.3). See also Aristotle *Politics* 1294b24–9.
- 27 On sumptuary laws in ancient Greece, with a particular focus on those applying to clothing, see Culham 1986 and Mills 1984. On the “democratization” of clothing in Athens, see Geddes 1987.
- 28 For an argument that something similar happened in Athens after the establishment of a democratic form of government, see Miller 2000.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The relationship between sport and democratization, past and present, is discussed in detail in Christesen 2012b; the discussion found here builds directly on that work. On definitions of democracy and democratization, see Dunn 2005 and Grugel 2002.

For a relatively brief survey of Greek history, see Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan, *et al.* 2007. For a more detailed account, see the relevant volumes in the *Cambridge Ancient History* series. An introduction to ancient Sparta and its history can be found in Kennell 2010. For a more detailed account, see Cartledge 2002. An introduction to Athenian democracy can be found in Thorley 2004. There is among modern-day scholars a wide range of perspectives on sociopolitical developments in the Greek world in the seventh through fourth centuries. The perspective articulated here is based on Donlan 1999; Morris 2000; Raaflaub 1997; and Raaflaub and Wallace 2007. On the history of warfare in ancient Greece, see the articles collected in Sabin, van Wees, and Whitby 2007.

On the changes in Greek sport in the sixth century, see Christesen 2007b. On sport in Sparta, see Christesen 2012a and forthcoming. On sport in Athens, see Kyle 1987. The extent to which nonelites participated in sport in Athens has been the subject of extended debate in recent years, most notably between Nick Fisher and David Pritchard (see Fisher 1998, 2009, 2011 and Pritchard 2003, 2004, 2009). There has been a great deal of inconclusive debate about the socioeconomic status of the families that produced elite athletes such as Olympic victors; see, for instance, Pleket 2001 and Young 1984: 107–70. The relevant evidence is insufficient to reach any firm conclusions, and the significance of those conclusions would in any case be quite limited. Even if most elite athletes came from very wealthy families, that would say little about the socioeconomic background of the vastly more numerous group of less accomplished athletes.

There is no single, comprehensive work on athletic nudity in ancient Greece. Perhaps the single most important piece of scholarly work on that subject can be found in Bonfante 1989, though see also Scanlon 2002: 205–10. On the date of the introduction of athletic nudity, see Christesen 2007a: 353–9 and McDonnell 1991. The relevant ancient Greek terminology is discussed in Christesen 2002. The relevant ancient sources can be found in English translation in Sweet 1987: 124–33.

CHAPTER 14

Growing Up with Greek Sport

Education and Athletics

Werner Petermandl

1 Introduction

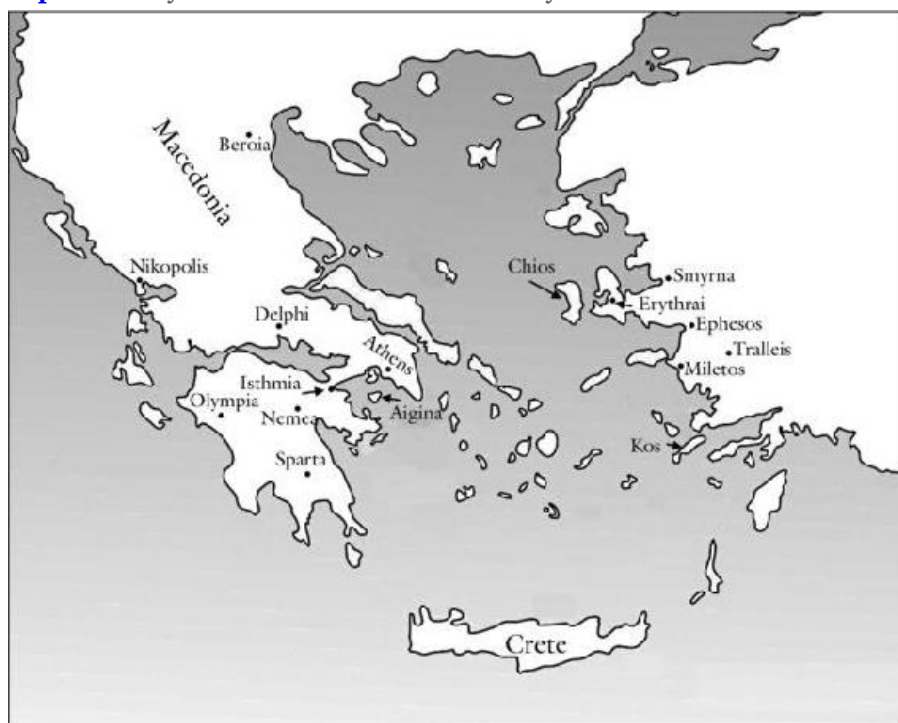
This essay focuses on the sport activities of boys and adolescent males in ancient Greece (on females in Greek sport, see Chapter 16 in this volume). Before proceeding, we should acknowledge that the available sources are relatively limited, particularly in view of the great cultural and social importance Greeks attached to both sport and education. The extant evidence (e.g., inscriptions containing victor lists, vase paintings with educational or *gymnasion* scenes, ancient authors such as Aeschines and Plato) for most periods of Greek history and for most areas of the ancient Greek world is much less abundant than one might hope. Moreover, institutions and practices, including education and the role of sport in the upbringing of young males, varied considerably from place to place. We need, therefore, to be cautious in generalizing about the Greek world as a whole based on what we know about specific times and places.

2 Physical Education

The oldest Greek literary texts, the Homeric epics, provide scant direct information on physical education, but some pattern of at least informal training of young males can be assumed because upper class men were expected to be able to participate in athletic events (see, for

example, Homer *Odyssey* 8.159–64 as well as Chapter 3). In ancient times it was widely believed that a highly organized system of physical education was instituted in Sparta at quite an early date and was based in large part on practices borrowed from Crete (see, for example, Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 2.34; see [Map 14.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay). However, the date when the Spartan system of physical education came into being and the origins and structure of that system remain subjects of ongoing scholarly debate (see Chapter 9). The earliest significant pieces of evidence for Greek physical education pertain to Athens during the Classical period (480–323).¹ Of particular importance is the information provided in the work of authors such as Plato, Xenophon, Aeschines, and Aristotle, who lived and worked in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries.

Map 14.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



A passage in Xenophon’s *Constitution of the Spartans* is an important source indicating the age at which boys began their education: “Those of the other Greeks [i.e., Greeks other than Spartans] who claim that they bring up their sons best, place them in the care of pedagogues from the moment they understand what is said to them; they immediately send them to teachers to learn their letters, music, and the sports practiced in the *palaistra*” (2.1, trans. M. Lipka). Scholars

generally understand Xenophon to mean that the formal education of boys in most Greek communities began at the age of 7 (e.g., Christes 2002: 818; Forbes 1929: 57). Another important piece of information to be gleaned from Xenophon's text is that boys learned "letters, music, and the sports practiced in the *palaistra*." A *palaistra* (*palaistrai* in the plural) was a building used for physical education; it typically took the form of a rectangular structure with an interior courtyard (see Chapter 19).

Some physical education teachers, who were called *paidotribai* (*paidotribes* in the singular, the same word was used for athletic coaches), seem to have owned a *palaistra* (Kyle 1987: 67–8). A passage in a speech written by Aeschines provides information about some rules and laws concerning those institutions (*Against Timarchos* 10). For instance, *palaistrai* were not allowed to be open before sunrise and after sunset "for he [the lawgiver] is exceedingly suspicious of their [i.e., the *paidotribai*] being alone with a boy, or in the dark with him" (trans. C. Adams). This regulation seems to reflect a concern about improper homoerotic contact between teachers and students. (On homoerotic behavior in *palaistrai*, see Chapter 15 and Scanlon 2002: 199–273.) The same text mentions that laws also prescribed "what children are to be admitted as pupils, and their age at admission." Unfortunately it gives no more details.

The program of physical education carried out in *palaistrai* seems to have included training in all the gymnastic contests held at civic and Panhellenic athletic festivals. (On gymnastic contests, see Chapter 1.) Isocrates states that *paidotribai* "instruct their followers in the moves that have been devised for bodily contests" (15.183, trans. G. Norlin, slightly modified). As David Pritchard puts it, "Sporting events learnt and practiced at school were nothing less than the standard athletic events of local and international games" (2003: 304).

Physical education was believed to have a strongly positive effect on the overall development of young males. Aristotle, for example, claims that physical education creates in boys "the proper habit of body" (*Politics* 1338b7). Physical education was also considered helpful in producing good soldiers. In the Platonic dialogue bearing his name, the character Protagoras remarks that "people send their sons to a trainer . . . that they may not be forced by bodily faults to play the coward in wars and other duties" (326b–c, trans. W. Lamb).

Education was generally a private matter. Plato's Protagoras asserts that people send their sons to *paidotribai* and that "this is what people do, who are most able; and the most able are the wealthiest. Their sons begin school at the earliest age, and are freed from it at the latest" (326b–c, trans. W. Lamb). This demonstrates that the family decided how long their son should receive formal education, and it

appears that this was in large part a financial question. Indeed, although there is debate on the matter, several statements in ancient sources support the idea that physical education was above all a pursuit of the upper class (Pritchard 2003: 309–11).

2.1 *The gymnasium*

Starting in the fifth century, a certain institution featured more frequently in written sources. It not only became almost synonymous with Greek sport, but also a major institution of Greek culture: the *gymnasium* (*gymnasia* in the plural). The origins of the *gymnasium* remain uncertain, but the first indications of *gymnasia* can be traced to the sixth century. In the fifth and fourth centuries, when more reliable sources emerge, *gymnasia* can already be understood to be institutions used both as sports venues and also as venues for philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, who benefited from the presence of young people.

Gymnasia in different *poleis* (city-states) could vary considerably in form and function. They typically featured athletic facilities such as changing rooms, open and covered running tracks, free space for exercise, and a *palaistra*. Greeks do not seem to have always precisely differentiated between *gymnasia* and *palaistrai*, but in general terms the former were large and publicly owned and provided spaces with a full suite of athletic facilities, whereas the latter were typically smaller, privately owned and comprised buildings with more limited facilities. The fact that most *gymnasia* included *palaistrai*, which in these cases were public buildings that formed part of the larger *gymnasium* complex, can be a source of some confusion. (For more on the architecture of *gymnasia* and *palaistrai*, and the distinction between the two, see Chapter 19.) As time went on, spaces dedicated to intellectual pursuits, such as lecture theaters and libraries, were added to many *gymnasia*.

Gymnasia were multifunctional institutions that served as sites for festivals, leisure activities, and education of all kinds (be it physical, military, or intellectual). For instance, when famous philosophers visited a city, this was the appropriate location for their lectures. Nevertheless, despite numerous local and chronological differences sport always remained a dominant element of the activities that took place in *gymnasia* (Gehrke 2004: 413; cf. Weiler 2004).

Males of all different ages made use of *gymnasia*, though here again one must bear in mind that across different cities and periods of time substantial differences could occur. Inscriptions provide a great deal of information about various age-groups being trained in *gymnasia*. These inscriptions reflect a “system of civic age grades that each city had for

classifying youth” (Kennell 1999: 251). The most frequently mentioned groups are *paides* (boys, *pais* in the singular) and *epheboi* (youths moving from childhood toward maturity, i.e., at the age of about 18, *ephebos* in the singular). Also present were *neoi* (young adults, *neos* in the singular) and sometimes *presbyteroi* (older adults, *presbyteros* in the singular). Some communities seem to have had special *gymnasia* devoted to the use of single age-groups.

Whereas in earlier periods physical education seems to have been privately arranged, in Hellenistic times (323–31) in many communities *paidotribai* hired by the state worked in publicly owned *gymnasia* and were responsible for the physical education of *paides* and *epheboi*. (The activities of the *neoi* and other older males should be seen as physical exercise rather than physical education.) Evidence suggests that those *paidotribai* could also, at the same time, train athletes. According to an inscription from Miletos dating to c.200 (SIG³ 577), a *paidotribes* was allowed to accompany an athlete to contests abroad during “term” time, but he was responsible for providing a substitute teacher during his absence.

Athletic activities other than the events contested at local and Panhellenic festivals also took place at *gymnasia*. *Epheboi* are known to have participated in team sport contests, such as regattas or torch races (usually relay races), or even ball games. Such team sport contests were held on several different kinds of occasions, but were not usually part of the agonistic programs of the major Panhellenic sport festivals.

Paides and *epheboi* were also frequently involved in processions at community festivals and appeared in groups in public on other occasions as well. A *gymnasion* law from Macedonia that dates to the Hellenistic period “prescribes the attendance of ephebes at dramatic and musical and athletic contests, requiring that they should ‘not clap or whistle, but should watch in silence and in an orderly way’” (König 2005: 67).

The person in charge of a *gymnasion* was normally called a gymnasiarch (*gymnasiarchos*). Because the people holding this office usually contributed significantly to defraying the expenses of operating the *gymnasion*, they were normally wealthy citizens. One of the duties of the gymnasiarch was to organize contests in athletic disciplines. They were held at least once a year and constituted a type of exam. It is more than likely that physical education and contests in the *gymnasion* served to prepare and motivate potential competitors to participate in the official local and Panhellenic sport festivals.

An essential source of information about gymnasiarchs is an inscription containing rules for a *gymnasion* in Beroia dating to the

second century (see Chapter 22; *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 27.261; Miller 2004: no. 185; Gauthier and Hatzopoulos 1993). It refers to the gymnasiarch's duty to ensure that the *paidotribai* hold exams in the form of contests every four months. References are also made to the age categories of *paides*, *epheboi*, "those who are in the two years following their *ephebeia*," and to their respective exercise regimes. Interestingly, there is also an age limit of 30 for those using the *gymnasion*. An important section that sets out a list of those excluded from the *gymnasion* mentions slaves, freedmen and their sons, *apalaistroi* (probably meaning men who are incapable of exercise), prostitutes (male of course), working men, drunks, and madmen. This lengthy inscription provides detailed information, but it should still be referred to with caution when considering a typical *gymnasion* because it only applies to one specific location. (For more information on gymnasiarchs, see Chapter 6.)

Despite the exclusions at Beroia, we can assume that public *gymnasia* were, technically speaking, open to all male citizens. In practice, as Mark Golden suggests (2008: 38), "the gymnasium had always been the haunt of the leisure class." However, as Pleket (2001: 182–3, 208–9) demonstrates, it can also be argued that the rise of the *gymnasion* offered other sections of society the chance to engage in physical education and in training for official athletic contests as well (also see Fisher 1998).

2.2 The *ephebeia*

The most frequently discussed category of males making use of the *gymnasion* is that of the *epheboi*. This term described males on the cusp of becoming adults and hence what we would call teenagers (Gehrke 2002: 1018). In many cultures this time of life is connected with rites of passage, and that, *mutatis mutandis*, was also true in ancient Greece.

Evidence from throughout the Greek world shows that in the fourth century *epheboi* were subject to an institutionalized state-run training system, known as the *ephebeia*, that prepared adolescent males to become adult citizens. In particular, the text *On the Constitution of the Athenians*, attributed to Aristotle, reveals quite a lot about the *ephebeia* of Athens in the second half of the fourth century: all male Athenian citizens in their nineteenth and twentieth year were required to take part in a two-year-long program, which consisted mainly of physical and military training. The youths were given a good deal of specialized military training by instructors who taught infantry fighting, throwing the javelin, using a bow, and firing a catapult. The individuals in charge of the athletic training were

paidotribai.

Insights into the *ephebeia*'s various education programs at different places are provided by inscriptions. Obviously military training was its main purpose but sport was considered useful in this context (Gehrke 2004: 414).

Over time, however, the strong emphasis of the *ephebeia* on military training of citizen soldiers became less pronounced. In Athens, as Golden (2008: 38) states, the *ephebeia* by the third century "had become a kind of finishing school for boys of the most prosperous families." In the second century, lectures by philosophers became a regular feature. Physical and military training were nevertheless continued. Nigel Kennell (2006: xii) observes that evidence from the first century shows that "along with the well-known instruction in athletic subjects such as wrestling, *pankration*, and running, martial skills continued to be prominent."

3 Athletic Contests

Some of the young people who received physical education also competed in separate age categories at the highest level of Greek athletic contests, the Panhellenic games (on which, see Papakonstantinou 2012 and Chapter 1 in this volume). Several systems of age classification existed, but the simplest involved two categories: *paides* (boys) and *andres* (men, *aner* in the singular). This system, which was employed at the Olympic and Pythian Games, seems to be the oldest one attested in the ancient sources. Moreover, Pausanias (5.8.9) and the Olympic victor list transmitted by Eusebius provide a concrete date, informing us that the first contests for *paides* were added to the Olympic program in the 37th Olympic Games (632). The problem is that these sources are not contemporary, with both authors actually writing hundreds of years after the event, so their accuracy is doubtful.

Another system had three categories, with the age group of *ageneioi* (the beardless, *ageneios* in the singular) added between *paides* and *andres*. This age category was used at many contests, including the Isthmian and Nemean Games and the Panathenaia. The earliest evidence for its use comes from the early fifth century, when it is mentioned in the poetry of Pindar (*Olympian* 9.89, see the discussion in Pfeijffer 1998). A well-known inscription from Athens (*Inscriptiones Graecae* II² 2311) contains a list of prizes awarded in the Panathenaic Games around 380. It shows that the threefold system of *paides/ageneioi/andres* was in use and that the younger age-groups received

smaller prizes (see Miller 2004: no. 120 for a translation and, for further discussion, see Chapter 10). For instance, in the short distance footrace (*stadion*) the prize awarded in the *paides* category was 50 amphorae of olive oil, for the *ageneioi* 60 amphorae; the *andres* probably received 100 of such amphorae.

The relevant evidence suggests that the category of *andres* always remained the same, while other categories became subject to further and different divisions. After the third century new classifications emerged, such as the distinction made between younger *paides pythikoi* and older *paides isthmikoi*, the latter being attested at the Asklepieia Games in Kos (Klee 1918: 43–4). Other examples of new age categories are *paides aktiakoi* in the Actian Games of Nikopolis (Moretti 1953: no 68) and *paides olympikoi* (SIG ³ 1066; Ebert 1997: 193–9; Frisch 1988).

There is evidence from the Hellenistic period (323–31) that small-scale regional games used age categories corresponding to local age grade systems that regulated access to *gymnasia*. The details of those local age grade systems varied significantly, and there was, as a result, a great variety of age categories in different local contests. An inscription from c.100 (*Inscripfen von Erythrai* 1.81), for instance, shows that the competitors in an athletic contest at Erythrai were divided into *paides*, *epheboi*, and *andres*. An inscription (SIG ³ 959) from Chios and dating to the early first century shows that the *epheboi* participating in an athletic contest there were subdivided into younger, middle, and older ephebes, so that there were five age-classes: *paides*, *ephebeoi neoterai*, *epheboi mesoi*, *epheboi presbyteroi*, and *andres*.

The Theseia Games in Athens even used two different age-class systems. The typical disciplines of the big athletic festivals (e.g., footraces, wrestling, boxing, and *pankration*) were open to all Greeks, and they competed in two age-classes, *paides* and *andres*. Other events, however, such as the torch race, were restricted to Athenians, and here we find a local age-grade system, comprising *paides*, *epheboi*, and *neaniskoi* (Kennell 1999: 251–5).

How were those age categories determined and who was responsible for the allocation of competitors in the different categories? This would have been fairly straightforward in local festivals, where the civic age grades of competitors were probably known to everybody. But what about the Panhellenic games, where athletes coming from all over the Greek world participated? Some information about the actual age of participants at Olympia is provided by Pausanias (6.2.10–11), who mentions a 12-year-old boy who won the *stadion* race in the Olympic Games in 368. Pausanias (6.14.2) also refers to an 18-year-old who was not allowed to compete

in the wrestling contest as one of the *paides* class (so he entered and won as one of the *andres*). The age limit dividing *paides* from *andres* at Olympia might therefore have been somewhere around the age of 18. It is, however, important to remember that in ancient Greece birth certificates or similar documents did not exist. This fact alone makes it quite probable that the development of the body must have been the crucial point (Frisch 1988: 181, 184; cf. Crowther 2004: 92, 97).

A few ancient stories recount that athletes sometimes tried to be accepted into a younger age category, obviously to enhance their chances of victory. Xenophon (*Hellenika* 4.1.40; cf. Plutarch *Agessilaos* 13.3) reports such an incident. After the Spartan king Agessilaos had intervened on behalf of a young competitor (who had a homoerotic relationship with one of the king's friends), that competitor was allowed to compete with the *paides* even though he was the tallest of the boys. The Greek term for admission into an age-class is *enkrino*. The opposite term, that is, to refuse admission into a certain class, is *ekkrino*. Exactly this word is used in a small plaque found in Isthmia that reads "I, Marios Tyrannos, reject Semakos," possibly referring to a decision of one of the umpires to exclude an athlete from an age-class category (Jordan and Spawforth 1982).

The oath of the umpires at the Olympic Games is relevant here. Pausanias (5.24.9–10) says that, concerning any decision regarding the competitors, the umpires had to swear an oath to decide fairly without accepting bribes and to not disclose the reasons for their decisions. The umpires were probably supposed to prevent athletes who fitted the criteria for *andres* from entering as one of the *paides*. On the other hand, entering the next higher class was allowed. Pausanias (6.14.2–3) reports that Artemidoros of Tralleis was unsuccessful in the *pankration* for *paides* in Olympia because at this time he was still too young. Sometime later he won the *pankration* for *paides*, *ageneioi*, and *andres* in a single day at a local athletic contest in Smyrna (see the discussion in Golden 1998: 114).

It should also be noted that lower age-classes sometimes did not exist in all disciplines of a festival's program. There was, for instance, no long distance footrace for *paides* at the Olympic Games.

Two sources, at a first glance, seem to address the issue of child welfare or safety in sport. Pausanias (6.14.1) mentions that in 486 Pherias of Aigina was not allowed to compete in the wrestling contest at Olympia because he was considered to be too young and underdeveloped. Aristotle (*Politics* 1338b–39a) states that only a few Olympic victors in the category of *paides* also subsequently won in the *andres* category. He believed that the reason for this lack of success was the arduous training endured by the young competitors, which ostensibly had a detrimental effect on their physical development. The

report of Pausanias on one hand and Aristotle's comments on the other have led some to conclude that the protection of children in sport was a source of concern in ancient times.

Was child welfare, then, the intention behind the age categories of athletic contests? It seems unlikely. Indeed, Aristotle's criticism rather proves an absence of any such protection. The answer might lie elsewhere.

I would like to emphasize the importance of the distinction between adults and nonadults in Greek society generally. Taking that into account, it seems reasonable to assert that age categories in athletic festivals were based on the same criterion. That would easily explain the existence of the twofold age category system (*paides*, *andres*), which apparently was the oldest age classification in athletic contests (Petermandl 1997, 2012: 91–3; cf. Golden 1998: 112, 139).

However, as already discussed, there is evidence for more than two athletic age categories. The age category of the *ageneioi* can be considered as a – possibly later – additional division of the nonadult group. The other age groups constituted further divisions of the *paides* group. They start to be visible alongside the development and flourishing of athletic events during the Hellenistic period. Presumably, the emergence of these new age categories at that stage was due to “athletic reasons,” that is, inter alia to improve festival programs, to maintain competitive standards, to enhance the opportunities for victory, or to promote fairness (Kennell 1999: 252; Golden 1998: 107–9; Frisch 1988: 181).

A final question concerns the type of participants and the strata of society from which these young athletes came. As already discussed, *gymnasia* could prepare participants for the big athletic contests. Nevertheless, that might not in itself have been sufficient. As some scholars have reasonably pointed out, a certain degree of wealth was necessary in order to benefit from free time to train and to travel. Prize money won in smaller local festivals can hardly be considered adequate to have launched and funded the career of a young athlete. So it might be sensible to assume that these young athletes came rather from a wealthy background. But there is another point to consider: Pritchard (2003: 295–6) refers to an Early Hellenistic inscription dated to c.300 from Ephesos (Robert 1967: 14–32), which is “the earliest evidence of a city providing financial support to cover the training and travel expenses of an athletically talented but indigent boy.” The first wealthy individual who sponsored athletic training of a boy from Ptolemaic Egypt is probably attested in a papyrus dated to 257 (the *Zenon Papyrus* 59060; for an English translation, see Miller 2004: no 207).

ABBREVIATIONS

SIG³ = *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*

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NOTE

¹ All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Traditionally, Marrou 1956 (1948) has been regarded as the authoritative book on ancient education, but discoveries and advances have been made, and more current scholarship can be found in Too 2001. See Joyal, McDougall, and Yardley 2009 for a recent collection of translated ancient sources on the subject of education. For an initial reading of the subject of physical education in ancient Greece Forbes 1929 is still valuable, but it is important now to consult Scanlon 2002, especially Chapter 2 "Athletics, Initiation, and Pederasty," which contextualizes what he calls *gymnike paideia* in Greek society. For a newer point of view, especially regarding the situation in Classical Athens, also see Pritchard 2003.

On the Greek *gymnasion* as increasingly central to Greek education, see the important work by Kah and Scholz 2004 with its very useful bibliography. A new and relevant publication here is König 2005, especially Chapter 2, dealing with "*gymnasion* education in the Greek city." The institution of the *ephebeia* was recently examined by Kennell 2006. For epigraphical insights on the *gymnasion* as a central institution and a "bridge" to more advanced athletic competition, see Pleket 2001 and his essay in this volume on inscriptions as material evidence for sport.

For athletic age categories, see Petermandl 1997 and Golden 1998: 104–16 as well as the overview of "recent scholarship" in Crowther 2004: 97–8. Moreover, Crowther 2004, a remarkable volume collecting his important articles, at least five of them covering the topic dealt with by this article, is very useful, as is König 2010, which brings together a collection of important pieces on Greek sport.

CHAPTER 15

Eros and Greek Sport

Andrew Lear

1 Introduction

In today's world, with the appearance of famous athletes such as David Beckham and Rafael Nadal in provocative underwear advertisements, and a handful of (admittedly almost all ex-) professional athletes speaking openly about their sexual orientation, one could say that the connection between sport and eros is finally beginning to come out of the closet – after years of reticence, on the part of both the public and sports scholars (Guttmann 1996: 1–11). Such reticence was largely absent in the ancient Greek world. Courtship of athletes in the *gymnasion* was a respectable activity for an elite Greek man, and praise of athletes' beauty – or of their general excellence – was apparently a common topic for conversation, both between athletes and their admirers and among admirers. Moreover, Greek art (especially sculpture and vase painting) and literature (from lyric poetry to comedy to philosophy) openly portray and celebrate the attractiveness of athletes and the courtship of athletes in the gym. There were, furthermore, competitions for athletic beauty at major athletic festivals, such as the *euandria* (competition for “good-manliness”) at the Panathenaic Games in Athens (Crowther 2004: 333–9). And Eros (the god/personification of eros, “desire”) received cult worship, along with Hermes and Herakles, as a tutelary deity of several famous *gymnasia*, including the Academy in Athens (Athenaeus 561d; Pausanias 1.30.1; Plutarch *Solon* 1.4).¹

Aside from its higher profile, there are at least two further key differences between the way the nexus between sport and eroticism manifests itself in ancient Greek and modern cultures. First, although there are a few references to the attractiveness of female athletes in

Sparta (see in particular Plutarch *Lycurgus* 15.1),² or to women spectators' potential attractions to victorious athletes (see Pindar *Pythian* 9.96–100 and 10.55–9), eroticism linked to sport in Greek culture was almost exclusively homoerotic – unsurprisingly, given the degree to which participation in and even spectatorship of sport was restricted to males. More specifically, the eroticism in question was pederastic; that is, the athletes whose beauty was praised and who were courted were young males in puberty or adolescence, and the people praising or courting them were adult men.

Paiderastia, or Greek pederasty – the practice of erotic relations between adult and adolescent males – was typical of ancient Greek culture from the beginning of historic times to the end of pagan antiquity. It was generally viewed in a highly idealizing and idealistic fashion, although doubts about its ethical value seem to have developed in Athens in the Classical period (480–323 BCE) and to have persisted in later periods. Pederastic relationships combined, or were at least supposed to combine, erotic with pedagogical elements. They comprised in effect a system of one-on-one tutoring for elite Greek youths (called in this context the *eromenos*, “beloved one;” plural *eromenoi*) in the virtues their society valued, such as moderation and courage, which their lover (called an *erastes*, “lover;” plural *erastai*) was supposed to embody. Thus, given the role that sport played in Greek education (see Chapter 14 in this volume), it was natural for *paiderastia* and sport to be strongly linked and for Greeks not only to acknowledge but also to celebrate the connection between these two aspects of what in their view constituted the ideal male life.

A second key difference that must be borne in mind is that Greek athletes worked out and competed in the nude (see Chapter 13). Greek athletic nudity (and the associated nudity of males in Greek art) may have had nonerotic resonances as well as erotic ones, but clearly both *paiderastia* and athletic nudity were parts of a culture that placed a high value on young, athletically developed male bodies. It is also clear that the nudity of Greek athletes served to intensify the erotic aspect of Greek athletics.

We will continue our exploration of the connection between eros and sport by looking at some of the more important relevant textual and visual sources. The section on textual sources will cover four areas: myth, poetry, Athenian texts from the Classical period, and later texts.³ The section on visual sources will cover three: sculpture, *kalos* inscriptions, and vase painting. It is important to bear in mind that the themes of *paiderastia* and sport are so constantly linked in Greek discourse that it would be impossible within the bounds of this relatively brief essay to survey the relevant material completely.

We will then go on to consider three of the main questions about

the eros–sport nexus in current scholarship: (1) whether or in what way the origins of *paiderastia* and Greek sport, or more specifically nude athletics, were linked; (2) whether *erastai* may at times have taken a more direct role in Greek boys’ athletic education than is traditionally believed, either by providing them with funding or by serving as their trainer; and (3) why Greek athletes practiced what is generally, if incorrectly, known as infibulation, the binding of their foreskins or penises with a cord before exercising.

2 Textual Sources

Several myths connect athletics and *paiderastia*. For example, Pelops, one of the mythical founders of the Olympic Games, is described as the *eromenos* of Poseidon. Indeed, it is through Poseidon’s intervention that he wins a chariot race that brings him a bride and that, according to some Greek authors, led to the foundation of the Olympics.⁴ Pelops’s son, Chrysippos, is abducted by Oedipus’s father Laios, who falls in love with him while teaching him how to drive a chariot (Apollodorus *Library* 3.5.5). *Paiderastia* also features prominently in the myth of Hyakinthos, a Spartan youth who is Apollo’s (and also the wind-god Zephyros’s) *eromenos* and who is killed by an unlucky throw of the god’s discus.⁵ These stories show that just as Greek authors tended to see relations between adult men and adolescent males as erotic, so they tended to imagine these erotic relations as taking place in the context of athletics.

A connection between *paiderastia* and sport is also apparent in Greek poetry starting in the sixth century BCE⁶ and continuing for centuries thereafter. Some poets praise the beauty of athletes, others comment on love for or erotic relationships with athletes. Still others link *paiderastia* and sport for metaphorical purposes, betraying how habitual the connection was in the Greek imaginary.

The dating of the collection of poetry attributed to Theognis of Megara is (like its authorship) a complicated issue, but two lines attributed to Theognis that were probably written in the middle of the sixth century seem to be the earliest poem to make the connection between *paiderastia* and sport: “Happy is he who, when in love, exercises in the nude and, when he goes home, / Sleeps all day with a beautiful boy” (1335–6).⁷

Two sixth-century poets, Ibycus and Anacreon, connect eros (though not specifically *paiderastia*) and sport for metaphorical purposes. Ibycus (Fragment 287 *PMG*), when in love, compares himself to an old racehorse forced to race again. Anacreon compares

himself to a charioteer (Fragment 360 *PMG*) and uses boxing with Eros (Fragment 396 *PMG*) as a metaphor for resisting the power of love.

In the poetry of Pindar, who in the early decades of the fifth century wrote numerous odes praising athletic victors (see Chapter 4), the athlete's beauty is a constant theme, particularly with boy victors. At *Olympian* 8.19, *Olympian* 9.94, and *Isthmian* 7.22, he lauds victors as beautiful and their deeds as worthy of their beauty. At *Pythian* 9.96–100 and *Pythian* 10.55–60, he comments on their attractiveness to spectators (including women). This theme is perhaps most eloquently expressed at *Olympian* 10.99–105:

I have praised the lovely son of Arcestratos,
Whom I saw conquering by might of hand
At that time
By the Olympian altar,
Beautiful in form
And mixed with the prime of life which once
Kept shameless death from Ganymede, with the help of the
Cyprus-born
[Aphrodite]. (trans. N. Nicholson)

The relationship between *paiderastia* and sport appears repeatedly in the work of Aristophanes, Plato, and Xenophon. Indeed, as is true for many aspects of life and culture, we have more evidence from Classical Athens than from any other time and place in Greek history for this connection. In Aristophanes' *Clouds* (973–6), when the Better Argument wants to praise the modesty of the boys of the past (or rather their modest acknowledgment of the desires of their *erastai*), he does so by praising their behavior (973) “at the [athletic] trainer's.” At *Birds* 137–42, the character Euelpides, a kind of Athenian everyman, describes a fantasy Athens where, when he meets a boy leaving the *gymnasion*, he can make passes at him, hug him, and kiss him, with encouragement from the boy's father. At both *Peace* 762–3 and *Wasps* 1023–5, Aristophanes claims that when he won prizes for his comedies, he did not become conceited and go through *palaistrai* (wrestling schools, see Chapter 19) trying to pick up boys. The scholia (ancient footnotes) tell us that this is a response to Eupolis, another comic writer, who in his comedy *Autolykos* said that he did this. This suggests that cruising *gymnasia* for boys was common, though perhaps it did not conform to an idealized style of *paiderastia*.

The situation is similar in the work of Plato. Plato's *Charmides* (153d–4a), *Euthydemus* (273a–4c), and *Lysis* (204b–7c) are all set in *gymnasia* or *palaistrai*. One beautiful boy is central to the beginning of each dialogue: in the *Euthydemus* Kleinias, in the other two dialogues

the youths for whom they are named. Lysis is being courted by a youth named Hippothales; Kleinias and Charmides are both followed by a throng of would-be *erastai*. Indeed, Socrates remarks that not only the adult men were excited by Charmides, but even the other boys, who gazed at him fixedly, as though he were a statue (153c–d).

Xenophon's *Symposium* provides a very modest portrait of an *erastes–eromenos* relationship with an athletic dimension. The dialogue takes place at a dinner given by the *erastes*, Kallias, after his *eromenos* Autolykos – the subject of Eupolis's comedy – won a victory in the *pankration*. The modesty of this relationship is clearly symbolized by the presence of Autolykos's father at the dinner. Socrates praises Kallias for loving a boy who is so desirous of glory that he has labored and suffered for the goal of winning the *pankration* (8.37).

Interestingly, it is Plato who shows us how courtship in the *gymnasion* might proceed toward consummation. At *Phaedrus* 255b–6d, it is touching in the *gymnasion* and elsewhere that releases the flow of *himeros* (desire) on the *erastes* that eventually causes the *eromenos* to believe that he too feels eros, so that both partners desire to touch, kiss, and lie down together, and in some cases (the second best) they yield to the desire for sex. Moreover, at *Symposium* 217c, Alcibiades recounts how in his attempt to seduce Socrates, he invited him to wrestle with him “with no-one else present” but “got nothing more” from it, thus making clear that an *eromenos*, if he wrestled alone with his *erastes*, would normally expect the *erastes* to try to turn their physical contact into sexual contact. The *Laws* too connects *paiderastia* and sport; the Athenian speaker, who disapproves of male–male love, blames its existence on Crete and Sparta and “other cities that are especially devoted to *gymnasia*” (636b–c).

The connection between *paiderastia* and sport remains a leitmotif of Greek culture until the end of pagan antiquity. In one of the poems of Theocritus (23.58–60), written in the third century, a statue of Eros in a *gymnasion* falls on a boy who cruelly rejected his *erastes* and kills him in punishment. The *gymnasion* and the attractiveness of athletes are recurrent themes in the Hellenistic (323–31) and Roman-era (31 BCE–476 CE) elegies collected in Book 12 of the *Palatine Anthology*. At 12.123, for instance, the (anonymous) poet speaks of kissing a boy boxer with blood streaming down his face, and at 12.192, attributed to Strato, the poet praises the attractiveness of boys from the *gymnasion*, covered in dust and glistening with oil. Another theme among poets of the Roman period is the sexual opportunities available (perhaps in the poet's fantasy) to boys' trainers (see, for example, 12.34, 12.222). *Paiderastia* is associated with the *gymnasion* and athletic nudity in Plutarch's *Erotic Dialogue* (751f) of the late first or early second century CE, as it also is in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*

(4.70). Boys' athletic pastimes and bodies are key points in the defense of *paiderastia* in Achilles Tatius's *Leukippe and Kleitophon* (2.38) and the *Erotes* attributed to Lucian (45–6), both of which works seem to date to the second century CE.

3 Visual Evidence

It is tempting to regard the statues of nude, athletic youths of *eromenos* age (*kouroi*), that Greek sculptors produced starting in the seventh century, as further evidence for the connection of *paiderastia* and sport. In fact, however, with very few exceptions, no specific attributes connect *kouroi* that were produced in the Archaic period (700–480) either to sport or to pederastic love. On the other hand, Deborah Steiner (1998: 133–5; cf. Ferrari 1990 and 2002: 54–6, 72–81) has made the interesting suggestion that the many fifth-century statues of athletes crowning themselves with their victor's wreaths are not only specifically athletic but also specifically erotic. In her view, by representing these youths at the moment of victory, the sculptor has shown them at the height of their erotic attractiveness. This is further heightened by their downcast gazes, which represent the *aidos* (sense of modesty) central to the behavior and identity of the ideal *eromenos*. This argument could also be applied to Lysippos's famous *Apoxyomenos*, a fourth-century sculpture of an athlete scraping himself clean of oil and dust. Lysippos chose to portray the athlete at a moment that, in vase painting, seems to be among the highpoints of the attractiveness of *eromenoi*, as is demonstrated by [Figure 15.1](#), a courtship scene in which a bearded *erastes* offers his nude *eromenos* a courting gift of a strigil (a bronze scraper for removing oil and dust after exercise) (cf. New York 1979.11.9, a red-figure kylix by Makron, side B, on which see Lear and Cantarella 2008: 91–5 and fig. 2.16b).

A number of literary sources (e.g., Aristophanes *Acharnians* 142–4 and *Wasps* 97–9; *Palatine Anthology* 12.41, 12.129, and 12.130; and pseudo-Lucian *Erotes* 16) tell us that the Greeks customarily wrote the names of youths they found attractive on walls, trees, and other surfaces, paired with the adjective *kalos* (beautiful), producing what we now call *kalos* inscriptions. Such graffiti have been found by archaeologists in a number of places, including Nemea, where nine were found in the tunnel connecting the *apodyterion* (locker room) to the stadium (Miller 2001: 86–9). As this space was largely reserved for athletes, these were almost certainly written by them, and given the general Greek attitude toward the attractiveness of athletes, they seem most likely to refer to other athletes (perhaps ones who had just left

the tunnel to compete). They thus may constitute a rare piece of evidence for the attractiveness of athletes to other athletes.

Kalos inscriptions also occur in vase painting. Vase painters began including *kalos* inscriptions in their work by the middle of the sixth century, and they were extremely common in vase painting of the later sixth and early fifth centuries, with a few appearing as late as the 420s. Originally these followed the formula of real graffiti and referred to a youth by name; around nine hundred such inscriptions are preserved. At some point, however, vase painters developed their own version of these inscriptions, praising the beauty of an unnamed youth with the words *ho pais kalos* (the boy is beautiful). There are thousands of *ho pais kalos* inscriptions; indeed, they are so common that it is impossible to estimate their number reliably.⁸ Like inscriptions with names, these can at times appear on vases without an image of a youth.⁹ The majority, however, appear above an image of an attractive youth, as in [Figure 15.2](#), another courtship scene, in which a bearded *erastes* offers a sack to a seated *eromenos*, who is identified as an athlete by the sponge and aryballos (a small vase for holding oil used during and after exercise) to the right of the couple. Indeed, so many such inscriptions appear above the image of a young athlete that this is the most common pederastically inflected motif in vase painting. Clearly these images demonstrate or even embody the strong link between *paiderastia* and sport.

Figure 15.1 Athenian skyphos showing a courtship scene, attributed to the Lewis Painter, c.460BCE. *Source:* Copyright © Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California. Catalog No. 8-4581.



The iconography of vase painting also often makes clear links between *paiderastia* and sport. Much as *kalos* inscriptions render explicit the erotic element in the portrayal of athletes, so various elements in pederastic scenes render explicit their connections to sport. Again, [Figure 15.2](#) provides an example: the gym kit to the couple's right (along with a net bag for holding *astragaloi*, knucklebones with which the Greeks played a game like jacks) sets the scene in a *gymnasion*, or if one reads the scene more symbolically than dramatically, in the context of sport. The contents of the sack that the *erastes* offers the *eromenos* will be discussed later in this essay. In other courting-gift scenes, however, the gift can be explicitly connected to the *gymnasion* (e.g., the strigil in [Figure 15.1](#)). Other elements in the scenes can also emphasize the link between *paiderastia* and sport, as does the *terma* (goalpost from the end of a stadium) to the left of the *eromenos* in [Figure 15.1](#) (cf. Mykonos 966, a red-figure pelike by the Triptolemos Painter, on which see Lear and Cantarella 2008: 45–6 and fig. 1.6).

Indeed one could argue that the youth in [Figure 15.1](#) embodies the connection between athletics and *paiderastia* – or rather, the merger of the figures of the *eromenos* and the athlete. On the one hand, he is a compliant *eromenos*: he is preparing to accept and to use the strigil his *erastes* offers (by contrast with the *eromenos* on the other side of the vase, who is refusing the gift offered to him with petulant gestures), and thereby allowing his *erastes* to see his naked body. On the other hand, he is simultaneously, by the same gesture and token, an athlete cleaning himself, with the *terma* that symbolizes his athletic activities

right behind him. The scene combines the inside and outside of the *gymnasion* as the athlete/*eromenos* blends the two sides of his life as a beautiful youth.¹⁰

Figure 15.2 Athenian kylix showing courtship scene, attributed to Douris, c.480–470BCE. *Source:* © 2013 Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence.



It is a commonplace of scholarship on *paiderastia* that pederastic scenes disappear from vase painting in the middle of the fifth century. This is in fact not true. Vase painting of the late fifth and fourth centuries no longer represents sex explicitly, whether heterosexual or pederastic, but pederastic courtship scenes remain extremely common. Interestingly, in this later period, the gifts offered in such scenes are increasingly connected to the *gymnasion*. While *erastai* in earlier vase painting favor hares and fighting cocks as courting gifts, the most common gifts in later scenes are discuses and strigils.¹¹

The vase painters of this later period also developed a new way of representing erotic scenes, through the presence of the god Eros. A number of such scenes take place in the *gymnasion*, where Eros is often flying over (or from or to) an altar, possibly his own. In several such scenes, he seizes a youth, perhaps forcing him to accept the power of

Eros, presumably in the form of love for an *erastes* or for a fellow young athlete. In one typical scene (Villa Giulia 47214, a red-figure neck amphora by the Flying Angel Painter, on which see Lear and Cantarella 2008: 162 and fig. 4.22), Eros, with a stick or goad in his hand, arises from his altar and chases a fleeing youth.

4 Three Questions about the Connection between *Paederastia* and Sport

Given the strong link between sport and *paiderastia*, it might strike the reader as surprising that this connection is not the subject of a great deal of scholarly interest. In fact, however, this is unsurprising; this link was not “problematized” in Greek culture. It was taken for granted by the Greeks and is taken for granted by modern scholars. Nonetheless, a few questions about it have arisen in Classical scholarship.

One of these questions pertains to the origins of *paiderastia*. As is the case with athletics and athletic nudity, the discovery of tribal initiation rites in the early twentieth century CE led a number of scholars to view *paiderastia* as deriving from such rites in Greek prehistory or as representing something tantamount to them even in the historic period, at least in such places as Crete and Sparta.¹² This idea relies heavily on ethnographic parallels from tribes in Melanesia in the South Pacific that practice initiation rites with a pederastic component. There is in fact some slight evidence in favor of this view, but there is no evidence to exclude any of the other common views of the origins of *paiderastia* (such as the idea voiced by Aristotle at *Politics* 1272a that it derived from an attempt to control population growth, or the view that it developed out of intense bonding in military units).¹³

Some scholars have also seen Greek myths such as those about the relationships between Poseidon and Pelops, Chrysippos and Laios, and Hyakinthos and Apollo as proving that the connection between *paiderastia* and Greek athletics derived from prehistoric initiation rites. However, as other scholars starting with Dover (1988: 126–9) have pointed out, the problem with such arguments is that Greek myths were highly mutable. There is no evidence that these stories date from prehistoric times in exactly this form; indeed, such evidence as there is speaks against this possibility. For the Chrysippos story we simply

have no evidence prior to the fragments of Euripides' play *Chrysippos*, from the fifth century. In other cases, we have evidence that the pederastic versions of the story were innovations. Pindar seems to take responsibility for the pederastic version of the Pelops story (*Olympian* 1.37–45), and while the Hyakinthos story appears as a full-blown pederastic love triangle in a vase painting of the middle of the fifth century (Lear and Cantarella 2008: 152–4 and fig. 4.13), our earliest source, the poet Hesiod (Fragment 171.6–8 Merkelbach-West), presents the story with no erotic element. Thus it is best to disregard myth when discussing the origins of *paiderastia*, athletics, and the link between them.¹⁴

In any case, the evidence of the Homeric epics suggests that neither *paiderastia* nor athletic nudity were widely practiced in Greece before the seventh century. Both instead seem to be new developments of the Archaic period and thus to be more probably connected to the intense homosociality of the early *polis* (city-state) than to tribal rites. A persistent tradition in Greek sources connects the development of these customs to Crete or Sparta, or at least the “Dorian” *poleis*. Given Sparta's prestige in Archaic Greece, it thus seems possible that the two were aspects of a cultural package associated with Sparta that spread to other *poleis* in the Archaic period.

A second question concerns the role of *erastai* in the athletic training of their *eromenoi*. Two prominent scholars have in recent years argued that they may at times have had a more direct hand in it than has traditionally been supposed. Nick Fisher (1998, in particular 96–8, also 2006: 243–4) has argued that, given the large numbers of athletes involved in such festivals as the Panathenaic Games in Athens, it is unlikely that all were from elite families. Instead, he proposes that some were from less wealthy families and were sponsored, in their athletic training, by wealthier *erastai*. There is little direct evidence for such relationships, but the argument is still (in this writer's view) plausible.

Among other things, this hypothesis led Fisher (1998: 97) to make an interesting suggestion about a thorny issue in the iconography of pederastic scenes in vase painting. In a number of courting-gift scenes, as in [Figure 15.2](#), the gift consists of a small sack. There is some evidence that such sacks are intended as money sacks. The argument has also been made that they contain *astragaloi*, but vase painters often make a clear contrast between these sacks and *astragalos* bags, as the painter of [Figure 15.2](#) has between the sack in the hand of the *erastes* and the bag on the wall (which is of a type often clearly portrayed as containing *astragaloi*). Given the disapproval expressed widely in Greek culture of *eromenoi* receiving money from their *erastai*

(see, for example, Aristophanes *Wealth* 249–59; Plato *Symposium* 184a–b; Aeschines *Against Timarchos* 137), this would seem to suggest that the youths in these scenes are not to be approved of. Yet often, as in [Figure 15.2](#), they are otherwise portrayed with all the conventions of praiseworthy *eromenoi* and athletes. As a result, these scenes are the subject of one of the most heated controversies in the area of erotic vase painting.¹⁵ Fisher, however, on the basis of his theory proposes that scenes with gifts of money bags represent an *erastes* offering to support the athletic training of his *eromenos*. There is no direct sign of this in the scenes, but it is a plausible reading of them and would explain how vase painting could portray youths receiving money from their *erastai* without any hint of disapprobation.

A similar suggestion has been made by Thomas Hubbard, who argues that some elite adult athletes may have served directly as trainers for their *eromenoi* (Hubbard 2005). Again, the evidence for this theory is tenuous. Pindar at *Olympian* 10.16–19 makes the unusual gesture of referring to the trainer of the young athlete whom the ode praises by name and also compares athlete and trainer to Achilles and Patroklos, generally regarded in Archaic and Classical Greece as a pederastic couple.¹⁶ All of this might suggest that the trainer was of elite status, because only in this case could he be a worthy *erastes* for such an *eromenos*. The other evidence is, however, less certain. Indeed, on the whole, vase painting would seem to suggest the opposite, as *erastai* and trainers, although of the same age-types and therefore iconographically similar, are generally clearly distinguished by their attributes – in the case of *erastai* gifts and other props or gestures connected with courtship, in that of trainers, their trainer's rods. To this writer's knowledge, no single figure in Athenian vase painting has both types of attribute. Nonetheless, as with Fisher's theory, Hubbard's is not implausible. Greeks of elite status generally did not work for pay, but as some of the sophists seem to have been exceptions to this rule, there is no reason why some trainers could not also have been. However, they are more likely to have trained their charges without pay, for a combination of glory and love.¹⁷

A third question has to do with the practice known as "infibulation." A number of vase paintings show Greek athletes either binding their foreskin or penis with a cord or with their foreskin or penis so bound¹⁸; this binding also appears in some scenes of adult revelers, and even satyrs. In an Etruscan tomb painting (from the Tomb of the Monkey), a group of athletes has bound their penises to a belt around their waists (see Scanlon 2002: 235, figs. 8–5). There are no textual references to this custom in Archaic or Classical Greek sources,¹⁹ and as a result we are uncertain as to the details. We do not know how common it was, if it was largely an athletic practice or

a more widespread one, or how foreskins/penises were actually bound. Is the Etruscan wall painting, for instance, a more complete rendering of the practice, or does it portray an Etruscan variation? Nor do we know why this was done. It seems unlikely that it can have served to protect the penis from any of the dangers of nude athletics, on the model of a modern jockstrap, or to improve athletic performance. If either of these were the purpose, then the testicles would have been bound in some way as well (Sweet 1985: 47–9). A number of scholars (for instance Scanlon 2002: 235) have suggested that it may have served to prevent erections caused by the attractions of other athletes. Yet it seems unlikely that athletes can often have got erections while engaged in sport, with its discomforts (although Alcibiades' attempt to seduce Socrates by wrestling with him suggests that wrestling in particular may have been regarded as potentially sexually exciting). Perhaps the best interpretation that has been suggested (Sansone 1988: 120) is that the custom was symbolic of sexual restraint, a virtue often praised in Greek writing, sometimes with particular reference to athletes (see, for instance, Plato *Laws* 839e–40b). This explanation has the advantage of applying equally to the athletes and the nonathletes portrayed as bound. It even suggests how its appearance in a satyr scene may have functioned as a joke.

ABBREVIATIONS

PMG = D. L. Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci*

NOTES

1 For the worship of Eros in other *gymnasia*, see Athenaeus 13.561f–2a for Samos and Pausanias 6.23.3 for Elis. Note also that an athletic festival, called the Erotidia, was held in honor of Eros in Thespiiai (in Boeotia), Eros's most important cult center; this festival serves as the setting for Plutarch's *Erotic Dialogue*.

2 See Scanlon 2002: 122–7 for the idea that female athletics, when and where they were practiced, also had an erotic aspect.

3 In the interests of brevity, legal codes are not discussed here, though sources including Aeschines' *Against Timarchos* and the law from Beroia, discussed in Chapter 22 in this volume, offer important information on *paiderastia* and sport.

4 The best-known recounting of this myth can be found in Pindar *Olympian* 1. For a full discussion of the other relevant sources, see Weiler 1974: 209–17.

5 The relevant sources are listed and briefly discussed in Scanlon

2002: 73–4.

6 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

7 On Theognis, see Figueira and Nagy 1985 and Selle 2008. All translations of ancient sources are my own.

8 Lissarrague 1999: 365 cites figures from the great nineteenth-century CE collector, Prince Lucien Bonaparte, that would indicate that there may be as many as twenty thousand, though, as he says, “this very approximate calculation needs to be checked against other samples.”

9 See Lear and Cantarella 2008: 164–5 and 171–2 for discussion and 171 n. 18 for bibliography on this issue.

10 There are many other examples of such athletes/*eromenoi*; see for instance the beribboned young athlete on Boston 10.178 (a red-figure Panathenaic amphora by the Kleophrades Painter, on which see Lear and Cantarella 2008: 96–7 and fig. 2.18), who carries an aryballos on his left arm and on his right a live hare, the most common pederastic courtship gift in vase painting of this period.

11 See for example, side B of Louvre G 521 (a red-figure bell krater by the Painter of Louvre G 521, on which see Lear and Cantarella 2008: 178–9 and fig. 4.21b), where two *erastai* each offer a young athlete a strigil.

12 This idea was first voiced by Bethe in 1907. It is generally more popular in continental Europe than in the United Kingdom and North America. For the continental perspective, see Jeanmaire 1939; Brelich 1969; Bremmer 1980; Patzer 1982; and Sergent 1986 (1984). For more skeptical views, see Dover 1988 and Percy 1996: 17.

13 See Lear 2013 for discussion of this issue and bibliography.

14 See Scanlon 2002: 64–97 for extensive (and skeptical) discussion of the view that athletic nudity and *paiderastia* are related elements deriving from initiation rites.

15 See Lear and Cantarella 2008: 79–86 for discussion and bibliography.

16 See, for instance, Aeschylus Fragments 135 and 136 Radt and Plato *Symposium* 180a.

17 On the Sophists’ acceptance of fees from their students, see Tell 2011: 39–60.

18 See, for example, Side A of Berlin 2180 (a red-figure kalix krater by Euphronios), illustrated as fig. 5.1a in Lear and Cantarella 2008: 166, and Scanlon 2002: 234–6 for discussion and bibliography.

19 Late Antique dictionaries give us a name for the binding, *kynodesme* (dog’s leash) (see, for example, Pollux 2.4.171), although

most modern writers refer to the practice as infibulation, a word which actually refers to a Roman practice of closing the foreskin with a pin (*fibula*).

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The relationship between athletics and eros, in particular pederastic eros, is a common theme in Greek literature and art. It is also frequently mentioned in modern scholarship (see for instance Dover 1988, in particular pp. 54–5 and 69–70), but there is little work directly on this topic, probably because the link is so firmly established that it seems to require little comment. The main current treatment of the theme is Scanlon 2002, see in particular chapters 3 (pp. 64–97) and 8 (pp. 199–273), "Athletics, Initiation, and Pederasty" and "Eros and Greek Athletics" respectively. The relevant literary

evidence is collected in Hubbard 2003. Lear and Cantarella (2008) contains extensive discussion of the artistic evidence. There are also articles on specific aspects of the issue. Steiner (1998) points to interesting parallels between the representation of athletes in poetry and the visual arts. Fisher (1998 and 2006) has questioned the traditional view of athletics as an exclusively elite activity by suggesting that *erastai* from the elite may have sponsored the athletic careers of nonelite *eromenoi* and thereby facilitated their rise into the elite. Hubbard (2005) has made a different argument on a similar theme, suggesting that some elite *erastai* may have served as athletic trainers for their *eromenoi*.

CHAPTER 16

Greek Female Sport

Rites, Running, and Racing

Donald G. Kyle

1 Introduction

Eminent Classicist Bernard Knox (1992: 27) remarked that the Greeks “created a form of society in which, for all practical purposes (which were, for them, war, politics, competitive athletics, and litigation), women played no part whatsoever.” Although the “whatsoever” is overstated, Greek female sport never had the societal importance that was accorded to male sport. It is, nonetheless, eminently worthy of study, not least because of its relevance to gender issues and ethnic discourse. Public, nude, and often violent, male athletics (i.e., high-level, public competitions for prizes) were applauded as a marker of Greek masculine excellence, but – except in Sparta – motherhood and the family home largely circumscribed the social role of females. Xenophon (*Oeconomicus* 10.9), for example, said that women’s work tasks sufficed for their “exercise.”

This essay surveys the significance of sport for Greek girls and women, from local rituals to physical education and competition in major festivals, from early Greece to the Roman Empire. Greek society of the Archaic (700–480 BCE) and Classical (480–323 BCE)¹ periods offered few opportunities for females to compete physically. Female sport typically involved unmarried young girls (*parthenoi*) in rituals of transition or initiation, which prepared them for marriage. Spartan female physical education and indirect female equestrian victories at Olympia (females owned horses but did not personally participate in the races) were anomalous. After the Classical period, however,

attitudes to female sport changed significantly. Encouraged by the Ptolemies of Alexandria, Greek royal females of the Hellenistic period (323–31) became prominent, albeit still indirect, equestrian victors. Also, although direct female competition in track and field and combat sports remained limited, wealthy Hellenistic women might be officials and benefactors of *gymnasia*.

During the Roman period (31 BCE–476 CE), traditional Greek female sporting rituals continued, and opportunities for female sporting competitors increased within the burgeoning system of Greco-Roman spectacles and games. Ironically, the “golden age” of Greek female sport was not Classical Greece but rather the Early Roman Empire.

2 The Ancient Evidence: Problems and Perspectives

Evidence for Greek female sport comes in various forms but not in great quantities, and virtually all our evidence was produced by males and reflects male perceptions of proper female conduct. Greek males usually recorded female physical activities only if they were seen as odd, improper, or erotic.

Works of literature starting with the Homeric poems of the eighth century mention Greek females dancing, usually in choruses. This socially important and apparently ubiquitous activity let girls publicly display their beauty and grace, but scholars disagree on whether dancing was musical, educational, sporting, or fully “athletic” (see Christesen’s essay on sport and democratization, Chapter 13 in this volume). Pindar’s victory odes, commissioned by males, celebrate only male victors (see Chapter 4), and a lengthy Panathenaic prize list (see Chapter 10) includes no female events. Xenophon (writing c.390), however, is a crucial source on female activities in Classical Sparta, and recently discovered Hellenistic victory epigrams by Posidippos enrich our evidence for Ptolemaic royal female hippic victors. Greek and Roman authors in the Roman era, including Plutarch, Suetonius, and Pausanias, mention Greek female sport, but they must be used cautiously concerning Greek sport of earlier periods.

The relevant material evidence includes a limited number of vase paintings showing females involved in sport. Those vases must, however, be interpreted carefully, since some are intended as illustrations of scenes from myth, and, as Jenifer Neils (2012) suggests, such images are filtered through the male gaze. Figurines

and sculptures of active girls may depict female sport or tokens celebrating ritual activities. Females in apparent sporting contexts appear occasionally in art into the Late Roman era, as in a famous mosaic from Piazza Armerina (for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay, see [Map 16.1a–b](#)), but interpretations of such representations vary. Invaluable testimony comes from inscriptions, ranging from a fourth-century epigram of a female Spartan Olympic victor to records of female victories in athletic festivals in Roman times.

3 Early Greece: Precursors, Epic, and Myth

Female recreations in the cultures of the Aegean Bronze Age included dancing, acrobatics, and ball games. Minoan art depicts females dancing and attending public performances, but, as Jeremy Rutter (in Chapter 2) explains, Minoan scenes of vigorous boxing and bull leaping probably represent elite, exclusively male initiation rites (cf. Scanlon 1999).

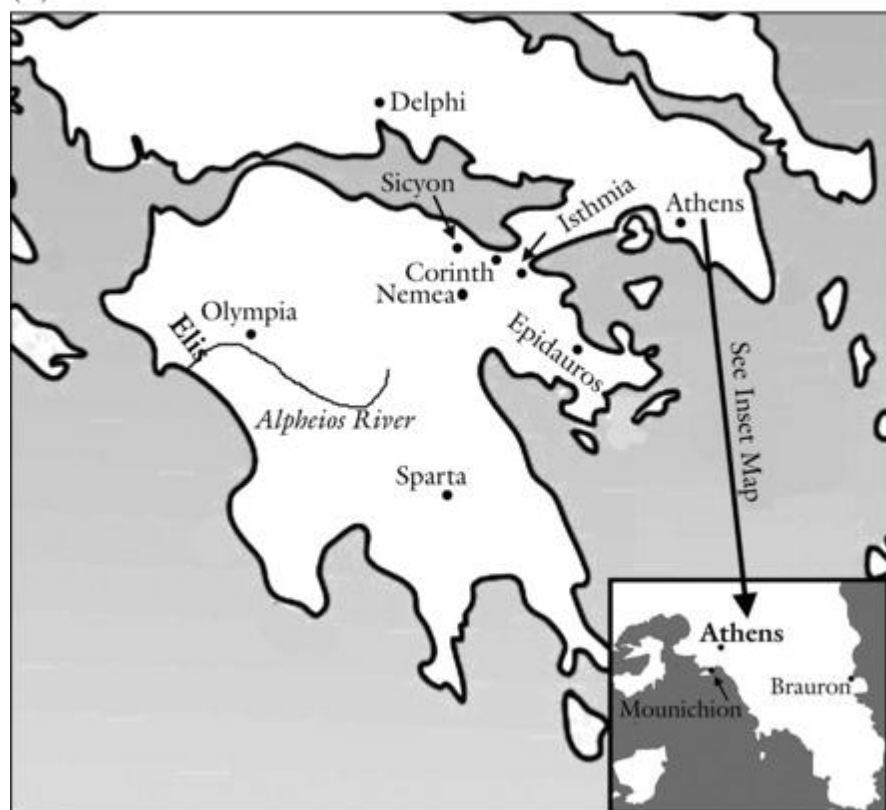
In Homer's funeral games for Patroklos in *Iliad* 23 (see Chapter 3) two unnamed females are mentioned, but only as prizes. They are objectified, like Achilles' Briseis, as valuable plunder, symbols of the physical excellence of the males who control them. Similarly, Penelope is the prize in the suitor contest in archery in *Odyssey* Book 21. In Phaiakia in *Odyssey* 6 the princess Nausikaa and her handmaids play catch with balls while washing clothes, but at the games in the Phaiakian marketplace in *Odyssey* 8 females watch but do not compete.

Map 16.1 a–b Key sites mentioned in this essay.

(a)



(b)



Greek myths depict Atalanta as an athletic female who broke

gender norms. Abandoned in the wilderness to die by her father, who wanted only sons, she was suckled by a bear and raised by hunters (Aelian *Historical Miscellany* 13.1; Hyginus *Fabulae* 185), becoming a great runner and hunter devoted to Artemis. Vase paintings depict her running and wrestling in skimpy sport attire (the *diazoma*), but such scenes, with erotic overtones, were produced for males. Not letting her father choose her husband, Atalanta instead raced against suitors for her hand. Many suitors failed until one tricked her by dropping golden apples, which she slowed down to pick up, causing her to lose the race. As Scanlon (2002: 175–98; similarly Golden 1998: 134–7) explains, this is a myth of inversion, like that of the Amazons, in which a nonconforming female is defeated and tamed by a male, ultimately reinforcing social norms. Accordingly, in Plato’s myth of Er (*Republic* 620b), Atalanta chooses to have her soul reborn as a male athlete because, if reborn as a female, she could not win the great honors and rewards available to male athletes. Early Greece, then, seems inhospitable to sporting females, so we turn to Sparta in the Archaic period.

4 Spartan Female Physical Education

Sparta seems to have had a system of female physical education that was unique, the only one of its kind in the Greek world. It is, however, all too easy to exaggerate the extent and nature of female participation in sport in ancient Sparta. Gaps and distortions in evidence, representation, and perception concerning Spartan females have created what amounts to a “legend” or “mirage” (Pomeroy 2002: 139–70 thoroughly discusses the evidence). Jean Ducat (2006: 223) remarks that the ancient literary sources on Spartan females come from males and “as soon as the subject of women is raised, fantasy springs up everywhere. The mythology of the Spartan woman is, therefore, particularly rich,” with entwined motifs of beauty, liberation, licentiousness, and gynecocracy (female power). Moreover, despite Sparta’s reputation as unchanging, as Ducat (2006: 223) says, the Spartan female experience “certainly had a history,” so we should be cautious about applying the testimony of late sources to early Sparta.

Non-Spartan authors, especially Athenians, found the idea of Spartan female exercise shocking – or enticing. In the sixth century Ibycus (Fragment 58 Page) claimed Spartan women were “thigh

flashers,” and in Euripides’ *Andromache*, written c.425, Peleus says that the exercises of Spartan girls – supposedly sharing running tracks and wrestling grounds with males – ensured that they were not chaste (595–601). Around 415 Aristophanes makes his Spartan character Lampito (*Lysistrata* 76–82) assertive and proud of the fitness she has acquired through dancing and training exercises such as the *bibasis* (jumping up and kicking one’s buttocks with one’s heels, see Golden 2004: 27).

Based on rumors rather than eyewitness experience, Athenian artists crafted imaginative representations of Spartan females. Neils (2012) persuasively identifies several images of apparently athletic females (nude, with strigils or *aryballoi*,² some swimming, driving chariots, or in homoerotic poses) on late sixth and fifth-century Athenian vases as depictions not of courtesans (*hetairai*) but of Spartan females. She also interprets some late fifth-century images (by the Aberdeen Painter), usually taken as of Atalanta, as depictions of Spartans. Such images of athletic females, on vases used in male social settings (symposia), reflect Athenian male fantasies, a “voyeuristic interest” or imaginative fascination with the beauty, allure, and real or imagined activities of Spartan women.

After the Roman takeover of Greece in 146, Sparta reformed and intensified its system of male and female physical education to invoke a glorious but hazy past (Cartledge and Spawforth 2002: 201–7; Kennell 1995: 45–6, 98–114). The increased severity and notoriety (and degree of nudity?) of female exercises perhaps inspired later imitations or exaggerations. For example, Propertius’s claims (3.14.1–10, in the late first century) that female Spartans practiced throwing the discus, boxing, and *pankration* in the nude among male athletes cannot be taken seriously. Plutarch’s assertion (*Lycurgus* 14.2, *Moralia* 227d, from the late first century CE) that Lycurgus, a semilegendary Spartan lawgiver of the Archaic period, introduced female discus and javelin events at best refers to a later expansion of female sport. Later still, in the early third century CE, Athenaeus (366e) suggests that Spartan practices led to nude wrestling between youthful males and females on Chios. Both prurient interest and female sport grew over time.

Our best strategy is to privilege the *Constitution of the Spartans* by Xenophon, a fourth-century Athenian exile and author who knew Sparta well and praised Sparta’s education of males and females as superior to that of Athens and other states. Citing Spartan female practices (1.4) as an example of Spartan exceptionalism, Xenophon says Lycurgus felt it was freeborn women’s function to bear children and believed that parents with strong bodies produced stronger, healthier children. With that in mind, he ordered both males and

females to train their bodies, and he established contests or trials (*agones*) for females in running and strength (*ischus*) – probably wrestling matches.

Later sources provide details of sport practice that may have begun in much earlier periods. Pausanias (3.13.7), writing in the second century CE, says that a group of 11 Spartan virgins (the Dionysiades) ran a race in honor of Dionysus, which Scanlon (2002: 104–5, 133–5, 287–90) sees as an early prenuptial initiatory rite. A second-century CE inscription from Sparta (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 11.610, on which see Mantas 1995: 134 and Cartledge and Spawforth 2002: 205–6) mentions this race, but with 12 runners.

Bronze statuettes of Spartan or related workmanship apparently depict Spartan female runners in short tunics (chitons), sometimes lifting their hems (see Scanlon 2002: 127–37).³ Other, more numerous, statuettes of girls (mostly handles for mirrors or libation saucers) are topless, nude, or wear triangular briefs suitable for vigorous exercises (Pomeroy 2002: 164–5).

Scholars debate whether – or when – Spartan females exercised in the nude. Spartan girls certainly danced in choruses (Calame 1997 (1977): 386–410; Ingalls 2000; Dillon 2002: 211–15), and Plutarch (*Lycurgus* 14.2–4) says lightly clothed (or nude) girls sang and danced in religious processions in front of Spartan males. Explicit references to Spartan females exercising in the nude come from later, less reliable sources (e.g., Propertius 3.14.1–4; Ovid *Heroides* 16.149–52). Ducat (2006: 235–7) and Christesen (2012a: 207–8) agree that Spartan girls were only nude in certain religious contexts, notably while performing in festivals and processions. Plato (*Republic* 457a) recommends nude exercise for the female Guardians in his ideal state, but the passage shows that the idea of nude female sport was seen as ridiculous outside of Sparta. Adapting Spartan ideas for another ideal state (*Laws* 833c–d), Plato later recommended nude running contests for virgins, but says that girls over 13 should be decently dressed.

Christesen (2012b, 153) also clarifies that Spartan females competed “against each other,” not against males. References to the sites of male and female activities (males at the *dromos* (track) and females near the Eurotas River) indicate that males and females probably did not exercise together (*contra* Theocritus 18.22–5 and Euripides and Athenaeus).

These varying bodies of evidence make it possible to sketch the outline of female sport in Sparta. Whereas most Greek girls married shortly after puberty, Spartan girls married around 18–20. They filled their years before marriage with public exercises, running, wrestling, parades, and dancing to train their bodies and to demonstrate their

maturation in preparation for marriage, childbirth, and productive motherhood (Pomeroy 2002: 12–27; Ducat 2006: 223–47). While dancing and playing sports Spartan girls seem to have worn a short tunic that left their arms and much of their legs bare. We are uncertain whether female physical education was compulsory for all girls or just a few, but if it was private, state authorities would have supervised it to some degree (Ducat 2006: 224–5). While patterned on the training of boys, the girls' system, without ordeals, was less rigorous and less all encompassing. The girls were not segregated, taken from their homes, or organized in age groups like the boys (Ferrari 2002: 164–6).

Spartan females were also exceptional in engaging in equestrian activities. They apparently drove two-horse chariots in the Hyakinthia festival (Athenaeus 139f). Pomeroy (2002: 19–21) makes a strong case for Spartan female equestrianism (riding horses and driving horse carts), both in knowledge and practice.

As Scanlon (2002: 121–38) concludes, Sparta's goals in physically educating girls were erotic, eugenic, initiatory, and prenuptial. The girls' training and parades before young men were to attract suitors and to better prepare them to be wives and mothers. Christesen sees some degree of empowerment for the girls, but he feels that regular exercises and competition were part of the Spartan process of social conditioning: female sport and dancing supported social order and patriarchal norms. Moreover, in Sparta, as throughout Greece, a girl's "sporting life" ended with marriage.

5 Athenian Girls' Races or Rites

Like most Greek girls, Athenian girls were socially conditioned for their domestic roles as wives and mothers. Young girls had toys and pets but few recreational outlets, and they married early and concentrated on their homes and families. Before marrying, however, some girls (either all who wished or certain selected girls, see Mantas 1995: 126 and Connelly 2007: 32–3) participated in rites called the Arkteia. These rites took place away from the city, at Brauron and Mounichion, and were held in honor of Artemis, goddess of young animals and of transitional periods. Called *arktoi* or "bears," these girls owed service to the goddess because, according to myth, a girl had caused the death of a bear, an animal sacred to Artemis. Fragments of fifth-century ritual vases found at Athenian sanctuaries to Artemis depict young girls of different ages, nude or in short saffron-colored tunics, next to altars, apparently running awkwardly with their hands

stretched out in front – perhaps imitating bears or fleeing from females costumed as bears. Some scholars understand this as an athletic race, but Scanlon (2002: 139–74) sees a ritual chase, analogous to a hunt, part of an initiation rite in which the girls fled from society and were pursued and tamed before returning to society. Ferrari (2002: 162–78) feels the girls performed a ritual circular dance that marked them as legitimate Athenian citizen females who could marry and bear citizen sons.

Such socially important rites of passage for girls, which signaled their progress toward or preparedness for marriage, typically involved special costumes and ritual activities performed in seclusion in all-female environments (Sourvinou-Inwood 1988: 15–105; cf. Langenfeld 2006: 176–7). Although generally ignored by the male-dominated historical record, similar rites were widespread throughout Greece, including the Olympic sanctuary.

6 The Heraia at Olympia

Pausanias (5.16.2–8), writing in the late second century CE, records that every fourth year, to honor Hera, a goddess of marriage, young girls ran footraces in three age categories in the stadium of Olympia. The races were run under the supervision of 16 women, all from the region of Elis, in which Olympia was situated. Those women also wove a robe for Hera and organized two choral dances. Winners in the races received olive wreaths, a portion of meat from the sacrifice of one cow, and permission to dedicate inscribed “icons” (*ikones*, Pausanias 5.16.3), perhaps statues or painted images bearing their names. Debate, however, continues about the history, participants, icons, timing, and scope of the races (Scanlon 2002: 98–120; 2008: 163–4). That the girls’ races were one sixth shorter than the male sprints (Pausanias 5.16.3) is taken by Golden (1998: 130–2) as an example of a “discourse of difference” in Greek sport. He argues that the race was staged in that way to emphasize male athletic superiority: “Women . . . were kept from competitive comparisons which might challenge prevailing hierarchies” (1998: 139). Bernardini (1986/7: 17–26) suggests that the Heraia retained the features of a local initiation rite and was not a serious athletic contest. On the other hand, Pomeroy (2002: 24) says, “The women’s race at the Heraia in Elis was the most prestigious, the equivalent of the Olympic competitions held for men.”

Pausanias (5.16.3) says the girls ran with long hair, wearing short shifts, and with the right breast exposed. Interpreting that costume as

the *exomis*, a shirt worn by male manual workers, Serwint (1993) explains the races as a prenuptial initiation rite in which the girls temporarily experienced “the other” by briefly pretending to be “male.”

Scanlon (2002: 113–16, 120) feels that the Heraia was an early initiatory cult that was reorganized under Spartan influence and on a Panhellenic basis around 580, if not earlier, but again our evidence presents challenges. Pausanias, our earliest and only written testimony, says (5.16.4) the Eleians credit the races to “ancient times,” and to explain the rite they tell a myth that Hippodameia founded the footraces to thank Hera for her marriage to Pelops (for further details, see Harris 1966: 179–80 and Langenfeld 2006: 157–62).

Assuming an early Heraia open to non-Eleian girls, some scholars suggest that most winners were Spartans (Pomeroy 2002: 24–7; Scanlon 2002: 115). A small uninscribed sixth-century figurine of Spartan workmanship (found in the area of ancient Epiros, modern Kosovo) exactly fits Pausanias’s description of the Heraian costume (see [Figure 16.1](#)). Like similar examples (see Scanlon 2002: 101–6, figs. 4.3–4; 2008: 164–8), this was not a stand-alone figurine but an attachment to a larger vessel, and Pomeroy (2002: 12–13, n. 97 on 25) and others have noted that the girl’s pose, with her head turned backwards, may be one of dancing. Also the girl’s holding of the hem of her tunic better suits dancing than vigorous running. There is no other firm evidence that non-Eleian girls traveled to a Panhellenic Heraia (see Langenfeld 2006: 179–83; but cf. Scanlon 2008: 177–84).

Figure 16.1 Bronze figurine, possibly made in Sparta, of a female runner or dancer, found at Prizren in Serbia, c.520–500 BCE. *Source:* British Museum 1876.5–10.1 (Bronze 208), © Trustees of the British Museum.



A Roman sculpture of a running girl in the Vatican Museum (Museo Pio-Clementino inv. 2784; Scanlon 2008: 175–7), perhaps a copy of an original Greek victor statue of around 460, includes a palm and seems to refer to the Heraia. Her costume is similar to that of the figurine just mentioned (i.e., right breast bare), but her tunic is shorter in length and gathered under her breasts, and she does not hold the hem. The dating and identification of the sculpture are much debated (see, for example, Arrigoni 1985: 122–3; Langenfeld 2006: 169–70). A full statue of a mortal female seems out of scale for a Heraian *ikon* (Langenfeld 2006: 171), and the Roman sculptor perhaps copied a statue of a mythological figure, namely Chloris, granddaughter of Zeus and niece of Hippodameia (Pausanias 5.16.4), who in myth ran the first race to Hera.

Scanlon (2002: 117–18, 287; 2008: 184–92) and others (e.g., Instone 1990; Dillon 2000; Scanlon 2008: 184) suggest that the Heraia took place, for logistical reasons (e.g., preparation of the track), just before the men's games, that male spectators could attend, that fathers brought their daughters to race, and that maidens lingered with their

fathers and watched nude male athletes to meet suitors and experience the “male world.”⁴ Such suggestions seem historically anachronistic for Classical Olympia (Kyle 2007b: 225–30). Fathers went to Olympia for an athletic, homosocial environment, not to attend to the safety of their virgin daughters – with their wives absent – amid thousands of males. Beyond a four-year cycle, we do not know when the Heraia was scheduled. Women’s rites were usually held in seclusion, and the Heraia was probably separate and segregated in time and attendance from the Olympics.

However ancient it may have been, Pausanias describes the Heraia of his own day, a contest that probably had changed over time. The costume and age groups suit an early initiation rite, as at Brauron, but the prizes and permission to dedicate an inscribed *ikon* suggest additions from the male games.

7 The Olympic Ban on Women

Females could watch athletic festivals at most sites in Greece (Dillon 2000: 457–9; Scanlon 2002: 219–26). The Olympic Games, however, retained an old, sacral ban on women, either participating or spectating.

Suggestions that maidens attended the male Olympics take inspiration from Pausanias, who at one point (5.6.7) says that women (*gynaikes*) were banned from the Olympic sanctuary and areas near it (on the Olympia side of the Alpheios River) on the days forbidden to women (i.e., during the male games). Any woman caught breaking the ban was to be killed by being thrown from a height, which suggests concerns about religious contamination of the festival.⁵ Elsewhere (6.20.8–9), however, Pausanias says that the priestess of Demeter Chamyne sat on an altar and watched the Olympics, and also (6.20.9) that maidens (*parthenoi*) “are not forbidden to watch” the games. Unconvinced by speculations that maidens could watch the male games because they were asexual, I have suggested that individual maidens might watch the games if granted the honor of serving as (or attending to) the priestess of Demeter.⁶

Also relevant to the ban on women is Pausanias’s story (5.6.7–8, 6.7.2) of a widowed mother, called Kallipateira or Pherenike, from a family that produced multiple Olympic victors. She supposedly took her son to compete at Olympia (possibly in 404) and, in disguise, she defied the ban and watched him compete. When he won, the excited mother jumped over a fence, exposed herself as a woman, and was apprehended. Supposedly – and suspiciously – she was not punished at

all out of respect for her family's athletic achievements.

Apparently the story of Pherenike became confused and inflated in sources over time (Kyle 2007b: 222–5; cf. Scanlon 2008: 189–91). Consider Pausanias's account (6.7.4–5, two sections after 6.7.2 on Pherenike) of how Pherenike's brother Dorieus was in 407 captured fighting against Athens and brought to Athens. Pausanias (similarly Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.5.19) says the Athenians let him go without punishment because he was a famous Olympic victor. Pherenike may have asked for and been denied permission to watch her son compete, but Pausanias confused two stories about the siblings. Her supposed disguise and exposure stem from her gender, and her release at Olympia comes from her brother's release at Athens. Later sources (e.g., Aelian *Historical Miscellany* 10.1; Philostratus *Gymnastikos* 17) embellished Pausanias's story to ridiculous lengths.

Again I suggest that Pausanias (and other later sources) may be misleading. By his time, the sporting world had become more accustomed to ambitious royal women and greater women's involvement in sport, so Pausanias perhaps accepted inflated stories about females from the perspective of his own age.⁷ Sporting tales tend to become taller, not truer, with time. Indeed, the first female Olympic victory (in 396) attracted attention for many years.

8 Kyniska of Sparta

Rich Spartans displayed their wealth by competing in Olympic chariot races, and Sparta's string of fifth-century chariot wins – in every Olympiad but one from 448 to 420 (Hodkinson 2000: 303–33) – ended only when Spartans were (temporarily) banned from Olympia in 420. Sparta's next chariot victory, in 396, became famous because it was won by Kyniska, daughter of King Archidamos. As a woman she could not attend the Olympics, but she entered a four-horse chariot indirectly and became the first female Olympic victor. Kyniska won another Olympic victory in the four-horse chariot race in 392. Two monuments at Olympia celebrated her success (Pausanias 5.12.5, 6.1.6). Her victory epigram, known from an inscribed base (*Inscriptionen von Olympia* 160) and from the *Palatine Anthology* (13.16), says, in her voice, that her brothers and fathers were Spartan kings, that she won the chariot race and set up a statue, and that she was the “only woman in all Greece” to win at Olympia.

Little else is known about Kyniska. Having inherited part of Archidamos's estate in 427, she could have afforded her own chariot team. Ancient sources agree that Spartan females had strong

characters and, relative to other Greek women, an unusual amount of independence and wealth (Millender 1999; Hodkinson 2000: 99–103; Cartledge 2001: 106–26; Pomeroy 2002: 73–94). A dedication to Helen at Sparta bore her name (*Inscriptiones Graecae* V 1 235), and Pausanias (3.15.1) saw a hero shrine for her at Sparta (cf. Hodkinson 2000: 327–8; Scanlon 2002: 23; Pomeroy 2002: 23; Millender 2009: 24–5).

Kyniska's motives in chariot racing remain uncertain. Xenophon, a longtime friend of Kyniska's brother, King Agesilaos, wrote that Agesilaos "persuaded" Kyniska to breed horses and that her chariot victory showed that a chariot owner was wealthy but not necessarily a person of virtue (*Agesilaos* 9.6). Centuries later, echoing Xenophon, Plutarch (*Agesilaos* 20.1; *Moralia* 212b) says that, disapproving of the Spartans' enthusiasm for horse racing, Agesilaos used Kyniska to send a message "to the Greeks." Even later, Pausanias (3.8.1) omits Agesilaos and says Kyniska was very eager to win at Olympia, and was the first woman to breed horses and win at Olympia. He adds (3.17.6) that other women, especially Spartans, later won Olympic victories (e.g., Euryleonis won the Olympic two-horse chariot race, perhaps in 368, and had a statue at Olympia), but none became as illustrious for their wins as Kyniska. Again, living in a later world familiar with greater opportunities for female sport perhaps helped Pausanias assume Kyniska's independent ambitions.

Modern-day scholars have voiced a variety of opinions on this subject. Pomeroy (2002: 19–24) presents Kyniska as "the first female star in Greek athletics," "an expert in equestrian matters" with a "single-minded devotion to racing." Others, however, question the degree of her independence and intentionality, and suggest the possible influence and motives of Agesilaos (Millender 2009: 18–26). Some relate Kyniska's chariot racing to Agesilaos's concerns about Spartan expenditures on racehorses or about Spartan political rivals, or his desire for Panhellenic propaganda. Perhaps Agesilaos used a female victory to challenge the prestige of male chariot victories (Scanlon 2002: 21–3), or perhaps Kyniska's win just reinforced the inferior status of females (Golden 1998: 133–4; but cf. van Bremen 2007: 370–1).

Other possible factors were political and emotional (Kyle 2003). Sparta bore animosity to Elis for joining an anti-Spartan alliance in 420, banning Spartans from Olympia in 420, and flogging the Spartan Lichas for defying that ban. In 416 Alcibiades of Athens won unprecedented success in Olympic chariot racing via extravagant expenditure, and he boasted of his fame (Thucydides 6.16.1–2). In 415 Alcibiades deserted to Sparta but soon departed, supposedly after impregnating King Agis's wife (Plutarch *Alcibiades* 23.7–9; *Agesilaos*

3.1–2). Although Alcibiades was murdered in 404, perhaps by Spartan orders, his bragging and his insult to the royal family were remembered. Leading a war against Persia in 396, Agesilaos may have pressured, or simply allowed, his sister to enter a chariot at Olympia. Her intrusion avenged the Eleian Olympic ban against Sparta, and her win diminished Alcibiades' glory by showing – to Spartans and other Greeks – that chariot victories were about wealth and not personal excellence.⁸

Possibly Kyniska was self-motivated and eager for hippic success, or possibly Agesilaos used her for his own ends, or perhaps their agendas were complementary. Whatever the motives involved, Kyniska's wins were noted later by Hellenistic royal females.

9 Hellenistic Females and Competition

As we have seen, Classical Greece offered few opportunities for female sport, especially after marriage, except for indirect hippic competition, as demonstrated by Kyniska. Circumstances changed, however, after Alexander's conquests spread Greeks into Near Eastern and Egyptian societies with traditions of prominent, powerful queens, and with generally better female status and rights than in Greece. The Hellenistic period (323–31) brought more female involvement in education and public life, and more high-profile female hippic competition. A particularly important example of this phenomenon can be found in Egypt, where a Greek family from Macedonia, the Ptolemies, became rulers after Alexander's death in 323 and maintained their hold on power until the death of Cleopatra VII in 30.

The Ptolemies, adapting to a cultural milieu of pharaohs and "Great Royal Wives," allowed and encouraged royal female initiative and political involvement. Like Philip II of Macedonia (see Chapter 22), the Ptolemies, especially Ptolemy II, used sport to legitimize their rule, to assert their Greek ethnicity, and to publicize themselves as wealthy and powerful (van Bremen 2007; Remijsen 2009: 249–54; see also Chapter 23). They established athletic festivals in Egypt, such as the Ptolemaia in Alexandria; they built facilities and subsidized Greco-Macedonian athletes who competed at an elite level; they patronized Olympia with benefactions (Kyle 2007b: 246–50); and they systematically accumulated equestrian victories by male and female members of the royal court at Panhellenic games and the Panathenaic Games at Athens as flattering propaganda and exciting sport.

It had long been known, from Pausanias and other sources, that Ptolemy II and his wife and sister Arsinoë both won Olympic chariot victories. Ptolemy's courtesan, Belistiche of Macedonia, also won Olympic equestrian victories (in the four-colt chariot race in 268 and in the two-colt chariot race in 264). Berenike II, wife of Ptolemy III, won the Olympic four-horse chariot race in 248, and the poet Callimachus prepared a victory ode for her equestrian victories at the Nemean Games (Golden 1998: 87–8, 133–4).

However, our knowledge of Ptolemaic equestrian achievements was greatly enriched by the discovery in the early 1990s of a papyrus containing a corpus of epigrams by Posidippos of Pella, third-century court poet to the Ptolemies. That corpus included a section (the *Hippika*) with 18 epigrams praising equestrian victories by male and female members and associates of the royal court. Raising issues of ethnicity, gender, and propaganda in sport, the new poems offer insights into the aspirations and self-representation of Hellenistic rulers (see Bennett 2005; van Bremen 2007: 349–54, 369–72; Golden 2008: 19–23; Millender 2009: 35–41; and Remijsen 2009: 249–54. The new Posidippan epigrams are discussed in some detail in Chapter 23).

One of Posidippos's poems (AB (= Austin and Bastianini 2002) 87, trans. van Bremen 2007: 371) celebrating an Olympic win by Berenike I, wife of Ptolemy I, is particularly relevant because it echoes Kyniska's epigram. Speaking in the voice of the victorious horses, it reads: "When we were still fillies, we won the Olympic crown of Macedonian Berenike . . . and with it we took away the long-standing glory of Kyniska in Sparta." Nothing here suggests that such wins were not great achievements. Another epigram (AB 88, trans. van Bremen 2007: 371), speaking in the voice of Berenike's son Ptolemy II, says, "To my father's great fame I add my own, but that my mother won a chariot-race as a woman, *that* is truly great."

Another, longer epigram (AB 78) praises Ptolemaic Olympic chariot victories over three generations: by Ptolemy I, his wife Berenike I, Ptolemy II, and his daughter Berenike II, and also three wins in the same competition by Arsinoë II, wife and sister of Ptolemy II. As already noted, Berenike II also won chariot races at Nemea (AB 79).

Whether these female victors actually attended the contests at which their horses won or just sent chariots, the idea of noble females competing in hippic events at major games – and commemorating their wins – spread in Hellenistic times. The expansion of the program of events at Olympia in 264, with the addition of a two-colt chariot race, and in 256, with the addition of a race for colts, provided further opportunities for female Olympic victories. As Mantas details (1995:

128–9; see also van Bremen 2007: 368–9), several inscriptions record “women victors in horse-races from the fourth century BC onwards at Olympia, Attica, Thessaly, and the Aegean islands.” Second-century Panathenaic victor lists record female participation by Ptolemaic (e.g., Cleopatra II, sister and consort of Ptolemy VI) and other noble females, facilitated by an expanded equestrian program and grants of honorary citizenship (Shear 2007).

Inscriptions show that female involvement – at least peripherally – with other forms of sport increased in Hellenistic (and Roman) times. Women sponsored *gymnasia* and produced games (as gymnasiarchs and *agonothetai*, on which see Chapter 6). Females were also indirectly involved in the educational systems of *gymnasia*, which were no longer exclusively male (Mantas 1995: 129–31, 136–40; van Bremen 1996: 66–81, 148–9; Bielman 1998: 33–50; Scanlon 2002: 348, n. 80). Apparently female personal participation in sport other than equestrian events remained largely a matter of initiatory rites during the Hellenistic period, but developments during that time set the stage for the emergence in the Roman period of an environment more amenable to female sport.

10 Female Athletics in the Roman Empire

Although Romans supposedly resisted Greek sport (see Chapter 36), female sport and spectatorship became more public within Rome’s eclectic and spectacular “performance culture.” At Rome women and Vestal Virgins attended the circus and amphitheater, females used the baths, and female gladiators fought (see Chapter 32). Roman attitudes toward these activities may have been conditioned in part by Hellenistic (and Etruscan) traditions that accorded elite women more public roles and influence than in Classical Greece. (See Chapter 26 for a discussion of Etruscan sport.) Roman expansion also brought exposure to Greek female sporting rituals, Spartan and Hellenistic female equestrian victories, and the fame of Spartan female physical education, which was intensified by post-Classical Spartan educational reforms. Contests for Greek females, primarily races for maidens, increased under the Empire, and for the first time formed part of some major athletic festivals. Augustus probably played a major role in this development but other emperors, notably Domitian, followed suit.

Augustus personally had reservations about Roman women watching nude male athletics (Suetonius *Augustus* 43.4), but he

diplomatically supported Greek sport. He and his wife Livia had strong ties to Sparta (see Cartledge and Spawforth 2002: 94–6, 98–9, 102–3, 205–6), and his successors in the Julio-Claudian dynasty established or expanded festivals with female events to honor women of the imperial household (Mantas 1995: 134, 142).

Inscriptions reveal connections between girls' games and Livia. An inscription of 25 CE from Corinth records that a Roman official, as *agonothetes* of the Tiberea Caesarea Sebasta (a festival to the emperor) and the Isthmian and Caesarean Games, established some sort of contest for maidens (*certamen virginum*, probably a short footrace) as well as a poetry contest in honor of the “divine Julia Augusta” (i.e., Livia).⁹ Also, a second-century CE inscription from Sparta records a victory in a footrace (*diaulos*) for girls (perhaps daughters of officials) in a festival established by Tiberius or Claudius to honor Livia.¹⁰

Sebastian Games founded at Naples to honor Augustus in 2 CE came at some point to include a footrace for girls. In 154 CE the husband of Seia Spes honored his wife's victory in the *stadion* race for daughters of magistrates at Naples. Since she was married at the time of the commemoration, she probably won the race before her marriage.¹¹

The strongest evidence for girls competing at major athletic contests comes from a statue base erected in 47 CE for a monument at Delphi that once included statues of three girls. The inscription, which records the victories of three daughters of Hermesianax of the city of Tralleis, provides the earliest known names of historical female victors in nonequestrian sports.¹² Tryphosa won the *stadion* twice at the Pythian Games and once at the Isthmian Games, “first of the virgins” as the text of the inscription proudly points out. Hedeia won the *stadion* at the Nemea Games and at an athletic contest at Sicyon, and also the “chariot-race in armor” at the Isthmian Games, and a contest in kithara singing in the boy's category at the Sebasteia in Athens. Dionysia won the *stadion* at the Isthmian Games and in the games of Asklepios at Epidauros. The three girls probably won sprints against other girls, but Hedeia's win in the “chariot-race in armor” might have been against males, and her win in kithara singing probably was against boys. Note that the girls won at six major festivals (in reasonable geographic proximity) over at least six years, but, interestingly, the Heraia is not mentioned.

The last Julio-Claudian emperor, Nero, an enthusiast for Greek culture and sport (Suetonius *Nero* 12.4), invited the Vestal Virgins, not just the priestess of Vesta, to witness athletic contests, arguing that the priestess of Demeter at Olympia could watch the Olympics. He also supposedly imported female wrestlers to Rome to perform, and shocked audiences watched a Roman senator wrestle a female Spartan

(scholiast to Juvenal 4.53; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002: 206). In 86 CE the Flavian emperor Domitian established in Rome the Capitoline Games, which apparently included a footrace for maidens (of unknown identity) in his new stadium (Suetonius *Domitian* 4.4; Dio Cassius 67.8.1).

At Antioch in 181 CE maidens from elite families, under a vow of chastity, competed against each other in Olympian games in running and wrestling (John Malalas *Chronicle* 12.10.288–9). Around 200 CE the emperor Septimius Severus arranged some sort of female athletic contests at Rome with large numbers of participants (Dio Cassius 75.16.1). Finally, the “Bikini girls” in a fourth-century CE mosaic at Piazza Armerina in Sicily are so-named because of their brief attire. Except for one wearing a himation (cloak) and seemingly judging the activities, the girls appear to be practicing or competing in games (running, jumping with weights, and tossing a ball), and some bear palms and crowns symbolic of victory, leading Lee (1984) to accept them as athletes, not entertainers.

11 Conclusion: From Rites to Athletics

In Classical Greece public athletic competitions were male performances, and female sporting activities were a significant but lesser element in Greek sport. Outside Sparta, Classical Greek female sport consisted of footraces by young maidens in rites of passage, notably at the Heraia. Girls engaged in sport, if at all, briefly before marriage, and married females perhaps recreated (played ball, knucklebones, etc.) in or near home, but they did not personally compete in public.

Classical Sparta’s female physical education, with running and wrestling among girls, was notoriously exceptional, and it probably intensified in post-Classical times, inspiring comments in later sources, but it too ended with marriage.

Mature Greek women competed only indirectly via horse racing, as Kyniska did. Hellenistic noble females were prominent as equestrian victors, and women might patronize *gymnasia* as gymnasiarchs and benefactors but, beyond Sparta, intense athletic competition remained a male prerogative.

The Roman era brought more sporting access for daughters of nobles and officials. Julio-Claudian emperors expanded opportunities

for female competitors in festivals to honor imperial females, and the inscription of Hermesianax (47 CE) shows that females competed at major games such as the Pythia.

Nero, Domitian, and Septimius Severus staged short-lived female events at Rome, and the “Bikini girls” indicate lingering interest in Greek female sport beyond Rome, but ultimately Greek female sport was undermined by early Christianity’s views concerning females and the body.

NOTES

1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

2 *Aryballoi* were small vases that held oil that male athletes applied to their skin after undressing and before exercising. Strigils were scrapers used to help remove oil from the skin after exercise.

3 Stewart 1997: 108–18 feels the figurines may be women’s personal mementos of maturation rituals (especially choral dances). Ducat 2006: 235–6 notes that none of the three sixth-century statuettes usually cited display the split garments mentioned in some sources, a style of costume likely to inspire the references to “thigh flashers.”

4 Scanlon 2008: 187 feels Aristophanes *Acharnians* 253–8 supports the idea that fathers brought girls to festivals to meet suitors, but a comedic reference to the nonathletic Rural Dionysia in Athens has little relevance to the male Olympics.

5 On gender-exclusive festivals, and associations of women with pollution, see Cole 1995.

6 See Kyle 2007b: 228 and 2007a: 138–41. A key piece of evidence is an inscription from Ephesos, on which see Robert 1974; cf. Scanlon 2008: 191–2.

7 König 2005: 158–204 shows that Pausanias and others presented earlier Greek athletics refracted through the lens of the contemporary concerns of Greeks under the Roman Empire.

8 Agesilaos attended the Olympics when Kyniska won again in 392 (Xenophon *Hellenika* 4.1.40; Plutarch *Agesilaos* 13.3), perhaps to reinforce his message about chariot racing, or perhaps to enhance his reputation after recent political and military setbacks (Millender 2009: 24).

9 On this inscription, see Kent 1966: no. 153, pp. 28–9, 70–3. The date of the inscription is discussed on 72. For further exploration of this inscription, see Lee 1988: 104 and n. 7 and Mantas 1995: 132.

- 10 On this inscription (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 11.830), see Mantas 1995: 134.
- 11 This information comes from an inscription, *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 14.602, which is discussed in Mantas 1995: 132 and Golden 1998: 127–8.
- 12 An English translation of this inscription (*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*³ 802) can be found in Miller 2004b: no. 162. For discussion of its contents, see Lee 1988 and Mantas 1995: 132–3.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Harris’s chapter on female sport (1966: 179–86) was ahead of its time but is now superseded by des Bouvrie 1995; Frass 1997; and Miller 2004a: 150–9. Fundamental reading includes Arrigoni 1985; Golden 1998: 123–40; Sourvinou-Inwood 1988: 15–105; and Scanlon 2002: 98–198, who expands on his earlier essays on girls’ races at Olympia and Brauron, Spartan females, and Atalanta. Langenfeld 2006 and Kyle 2007a, 2007b: 188–96, 217–18 have independently disagreed with Scanlon on the Heraia and girls at the Olympics. A response to their critiques can be found in Scanlon 2008.

On Spartan female sport, Pomeroy 2002; Scanlon 2002: 121–38; Ducat 2006: 223–47; and Christesen 2012a are excellent. On possible motives behind Kyniska’s victories, see Kyle 2003 and Millender 2009: 18–26.

Posidippos’s epigrams enrich our understanding of Ptolemaic female hippic victors, and excellent treatments of Hellenistic female sport include Mantas 1995; van Bremen 2007; and Remijsen 2009. On female sport and Rome, Lee 1984 and 1988 and Mantas 1995 remain valuable.

CHAPTER 17

People on the Fringes of Greek Sport

Christian Mann

1 Introduction

Before the Pythian Games of 246 BCE¹ the officials of the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi concluded several contracts with craftsmen. An inscription records the names of the contractors, the work for which they were paid, and the sum they were given (*Corpus des Inscriptions de Delphes* 2.139, for an English translation see Miller 2004b: no. 81). A certain Smyrnaios was paid for digging up the stadium and the jumping pits, Pasion carried in and laid out 600 bushels of white earth in the stadium, Kritolaos repaired the drain alongside the shrine of Demeter, and Olympichos carried out maintenance work on several buildings. Other contractors set up fences at the stadium and at the covered practice track (*xystos*) in the *gymnasion*, or were paid for the construction of a platform in the stadium. Apparently all these craftsmen prepared the sanctuary for the Pythian Games, which were carried out for the eighty-fourth time that summer. Delphi, like the sites of other important athletic events, had to be ready for the masses of athletes, trainers, and spectators who attended the games. These contractors shed light on an important aspect of Greek sport. At the Panhellenic games, the athletes received much attention, but many other people were involved in these festivals in one fashion or another. A social history of Greek sport would not be complete without a look at these people, so this essay focuses on the different groups on the fringes of the games.

2 Officials

The sites of the Panhellenic games, like Delphi or Olympia, were important sanctuaries and attracted visitors at all times, but huge crowds were present during the Panhellenic games. Besides repairs and redecorations, organization and manpower were necessary to guarantee the smooth operation of the games. For the Olympics, we are especially well informed about this dimension of the games because numerous inscriptions provide information on the institutions and magistrates (Dittenberger and Purgold 1896: nos. 58–141). The *spondophoroi* were emissaries who were sent throughout the Greek world before each Olympics, announcing the “sacred truce” (*ekecheiria*) and inviting athletes and spectators. The *kleidychoi* (“keepers of keys”) were responsible for the safety of valuable votive offerings in the sanctuary’s treasuries.

There were many other office holders, but most important for conducting the Olympic Games were the umpires. These umpires were originally called *diaitateres* (“arbitrators”), but from c.480 onward were known as *Hellanodikai* (“judges of the Greeks”). Their number changed over time. Pausanias says that for most of the fifth century there were nine, three to supervise the equestrian events, three to run the pentathlon, and the rest to run the other gymnastic events. Later on there were 8, 10, or 12 *Hellanodikai*, the number changing in response to political developments in the city-state of Elis, which was responsible for the administration of the sanctuary and games at Olympia (Pausanias 5.9.6).²

A new set of *Hellanodikai* was chosen 10 months before each Olympics was held and, for most of their tenure in office, worked out of a building in the market place (*agora*) of the city of Elis (see [Map 8.1](#)). *Hellanodikai* were selected, probably by lot, from among the Eleian elite, and some of them were Olympic victors themselves. Pausanias (6.8.1) tells us about an Eleian named Euanoridas, who won the boys’ wrestling competition at Olympia and years later became one of the *Hellanodikai*. Athletes were required to arrive in Elis one month before the Olympics began, and the *Hellanodikai* oversaw their training in the *gymnasion* of Elis. Before the games started, the most important task of the *Hellanodikai* was to assign athletes and horses to age-classes. In a world without birth certificates, it was difficult to decide if a young athlete had to compete with the boys or with the men, and in some cases there were controversies (Pausanias 6.14.2; see the discussion of age-classes in Chapter 14 in this volume).

The *Hellanodikai* were expected to be strictly neutral. At the beginning of the festival, they swore an oath to judge fairly and to

refuse any attempts of bribery. During the competition they made important decisions. They paired the opponents, assigned lines, punished rule breakers, declared the victors, and presided over the final ceremony. When the pankratiast Arrhichion died at the games of 564 after his opponent had given up, it was the decision of the *Hellandikai* to give the crown to the dead man (Pausanias 8.40.1–2). Their decisions were absolute and irrevocable, but they could be challenged before the Olympic Council. In 396 Eupolemos of Elis was declared the winner of the *stadion* race by two judges, while the third credited the victory to Leon of Ambracia. Leon went to the Olympic Council, and the two judges who had favored their countryman were punished, but Eupolemos nevertheless retained the crown (Pausanias 6.3.7).³ Even the appearance of impropriety was frowned upon. In 372 one of the *Hellandikai*, Troilos of Elis, was victorious in two of the hippic events, the two-horse chariot race and the four-colt chariot race. Apparently many officials at Olympia were quite unhappy with this incident, and they passed a law that no *Hellandikes* (the singular form of *Hellandikai*) was allowed to participate in the hippic events in the future (Pausanias 6.1.4–5).

The authority of the *Hellandikai* was indicated by the purple robes they wore while the Olympics were in progress, by the elevated seats they were given in the stadium at Olympia (which had almost no formal seating), and by the whip bearers (*rhabdouchoi*) who were under their command. In Greek society, whipping was considered an attack on a man's honor and a punishment usually limited to slaves, but the world of athletics was an exception. Breaking the rules of sacred games was considered such a severe misdeed that it justified the use of the whip against freeborn men (Crowther 2004: 141–68). In one famous case this punishment had political consequences: in 420 the Spartans were excluded from the Olympics because of a diplomatic conflict with Elis, but one Spartan, Lichas, nevertheless sent a four-horse chariot to Olympia, disguising it as a Theban entry. After his chariot had won, Lichas left his place among the spectators, went to the charioteer, and held a crown over his head, thereby indicating that the chariot was his. The *Hellandikai* had him whipped, and for the rest of the festival athletes and spectators feared that there might be a Spartan invasion (Thucydides 5.50; cf. Pausanias 6.2.2–3).

3 Jockeys, Drivers, Coaches, Trainers, and Musicians

Normally it was slaves or hirelings who rode the horses and drove the chariots in the hippic events at Olympia and, although everybody knew their strength and skill played a key role in determining victory or failure, jockeys and drivers received scant recognition. The hippic events were seen as a competition between the owners of horses and chariots, and it was the owner who was declared winner, who received the crown, set up the victory monument, and was praised in victory songs (Nicholson 2005: 23–116). There were, however, rare examples of owners riding or driving themselves. The most famous was Herodotus of Thebes (for other examples see Golden 2008: 12–13), who is praised by Pindar (*Isthmian* 1.15–17) for mounting his chariot himself like the heroic participants in Patroklos’s funeral games (*Iliad* 23.262–652; see Chapter 3, for further discussion of those games). It should be added in this context that, in contrast to modern equestrian events, a horse could run to victory without a rider. In his catalog of monuments at Olympia, Pausanias (6.13.9) describes the statue of a mare called Aura, which threw its anonymous rider at the beginning of the race and still ended first; its owner was declared the winner.

The social status of coaches and trainers was higher than that of jockeys or charioteers (Nicholson 2005: 117–210; Golden 2008: 23–39). Trainers oversaw athletes’ physical fitness, including their diet, and taught them specific movements, especially in combat sports; they also tried to inspire the athletes’ desire for victory. The first “coach” in Greek athletic history is Nestor of Pylos, who, prior to the chariot race held as part of Patroklos’s funeral games in the *Iliad*, gives advice to his son on how to win (23.306–48). In the earliest years of Greek athletics, family or friends probably supervised the training of young athletes and accompanied them to the games, but as early as the sixth century there is evidence for specialized trainers. According to Philostratus, the trainer Eryxias inspired the already-mentioned pankratiast Arrhichion, who competed at Olympia on multiple occasions in the first half of the sixth century, not to concede defeat even in the face of death (*Gymnastikos* 21). The medical school of Croton, a city-state that produced a large number of successful athletes in the sixth and early fifth centuries, probably developed training concepts that made the city’s athletes the best in the Greek world (Mann 2001: 171–81; see Chapter 12 for further discussion of Croton’s athletic ambitions). The Athenian Melesias, himself a former athlete, was a very successful trainer in the fifth century; Pindar praised him in victory odes and numbered the Panhellenic crowns won by athletes from Melesias’s “school” at 30 (*Olympian* 8.54–66; cf. *Nemean* 4.93, 6.65–6). Melesias belonged to an aristocratic family, and he presumably was the father of Pericles’ rival, Thucydides, son of

Melesias (Wade-Gery 1932).⁴

Another group that played an important role in athletics was musicians. *Aulos* players (the Greek *aulos* was a wind instrument similar to the flute) not only played at processions and sacrifices, but they were also present at the athletic competitions. They played during the jumping contest in the pentathlon, evidently because music was believed to enable athletes to get in a rhythm that helped them jump farther (Raschke 1985). In contrast to the Pythian and Isthmian Games, there were no contests for musicians in the Olympic program (except for heralds and trumpet players), but Olympia still attracted famous musicians. The *auletes* Pythokritos of Sicyon, six times a victor in the musical contests at the Pythian Games, blew the *aulos* for the pentathlon contest in six Olympics. He was honored with a monument in the sacred precinct (*Altis*) at Olympia (Pausanias 6.14.10).

4 Spectators

Ancient texts do not give us exact numbers of spectators, but the capacity of Olympia's stadium was about fifty thousand (Sinn 2004: 101). Literary sources tell us that the sanctuaries at Olympia and the other sites of Panhellenic games were crowded and unpleasant places during the festivals. One story says a man from Chios was so angry with his slave that he decided to punish him by taking him to the Olympic Games (Aelian *Historical Miscellany* 14.18). Epictetus (c.55 – c.135 CE) mocks his contemporaries' enthusiasm for athletic events and stresses the problems involved:

But some unpleasant and hard things happen in life. And do they not happen in Olympia? Do you not swelter? Are you not cramped and crowded? Do you not bathe with discomfort? Are you not drenched whenever it rains? Do you not have your fill of tumult and shouting and other annoyances? But I fancy that you hear and endure all this by balancing it off against the memorable character of the spectacle. (*Discourses* 1.6.23–7, trans. W. Oldfather)

Epictetus was correct that spectators undertook the journey to Panhellenic contests to see the athletic events, perhaps to cheer their countrymen, and to see the famous stars. But some attendees were also attracted by the crowd itself. These were people who regarded the festivals as occasions for earning money or glory: merchants, poets, sophists, and many other groups (Weiler 1997).

5 Intellectuals

Dio Chrysostom complained about the gathering of attention-hungry intellectuals at the Isthmian Games:

That was the time, too, when one could hear crowds of wretched sophists around Poseidon's temple shouting and reviling one another, and their disciples, as they were called, fighting with one another, many writers reading aloud their stupid works, many poets reciting their poems while others applauded them, many jugglers showing their tricks, many fortune-tellers interpreting fortunes, lawyers innumerable perverting judgment, and peddlers not a few peddling whatever they happened to have. (*Orations* 8.9, trans. J. Cohoon)

One of the less successful sophists at Olympia was Peregrinos of Parion. During the Olympic Games of 157 CE, he delivered a polemical speech against the sanctuary's newly built fountain house, which he stigmatized as a sign of decadence. In fact, the fountain house and the aqueduct that fed it distinctly improved the notoriously bad water supply at Olympia. Not surprisingly the spectators disagreed, and they even threatened to stone Peregrinos. Four years later the sophist went to Olympia again and delivered another speech, but nobody listened to him. Again four years later, in 165 CE, Peregrinos announced he would immolate himself at the end of the Olympic Games, and he carried out this plan – a rather extreme example of looking for fame at ancient Olympia! Lucian tells the story in a satirical tone (*The Passing of Peregrinos*), and Philostratus also reports the sophist's death (*Lives of the Sophists* 2.563).

6 Social Groups and Classes

The Panhellenic games brought together many people from different groups in Greek society. They were a platform of communication, and not only for athletes. But this unifying element is only one side of Greek athletics. The reverse is also true: athletics divided Greek society. They were, as Mark Golden has put it, implicated in a “discourse of difference” (1998: 33–45, 104–75). Women were excluded from participation in the Olympics and other great games (see Chapter 16), barbarians (i.e., non-Greeks) were not allowed to compete (see Chapter 8), and other groups also were denied access to Greek sport. The famous gymnasiarchal law from Beroia in Macedonia (see Chapter 22) demonstrates that authorities spared no effort to

define the people who were not allowed to participate: “No slave is to disrobe in the *gymnasion*, nor any freedman, nor their sons, nor cripples, nor homosexuals, nor those engaged in commercial craft, nor drunkards, nor madmen. If the gymnasiarch knowingly allows any of the aforementioned to be oiled, or continues to allow them after having received a report of them, he is to be penalized 1,000 *drachmai*” (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 27.261, side B, ll. 27–32; trans. from Miller 2004b: no. 185).

The sociology of Greek sport also changed over time. In the Homeric world, sport was characterized as an exclusive activity of aristocrats; the contestants at Patroklos’s funeral games in *Iliad* 23 are mostly the rich and highborn leaders. In the *Odyssey*, the Phaiakian aristocrat Euryalos expresses the distinctive character of sport when Odysseus refuses to participate in the Phaiakians’ athletic activity. According to Euryalos, a man who does not know athletics cannot be an aristocrat, so Odysseus (who has not revealed his identity yet) is supposed to be one of the despised tradesmen whose thoughts are about money, not about glory (*Odyssey* 8.159–64; for further discussion see Chapter 3).

Social access and mobility in athletics during the Archaic period (700–480) remains a topic of debate. David Young has made the case that, right from the beginning of Greek sport, professional athletes from lower classes took part (Young 1984), but the evidence is not conclusive. There are various anecdotes about athletes from the Archaic period showing their strength by reshaping a ploughshare with their bare hands (Pausanias 6.10.1–3 on Glaukos of Karystos) or doing other manual labor, but these anecdotes are probably fictitious. Moreover, although Koroibos of Elis, the earliest known Olympic victor, was known as a *mageiros* (“cook”) (Athenaeus 382b) this does not indicate he was a servant. Priests who sacrificed animals were also called *mageiroi*.

Over the course of the fifth century the social basis of Greek athletics seems to have broadened. This change is well documented in Athens; whereas the landed aristocracy dominated Athenian sports in the Archaic and Early Classical periods, afterwards there were many athletes with rather obscure social origins (Kyle 1987: 104–23). However, participation in athletics remained a hallmark of good ancestry. When Aeschines claimed his father had been an athlete before he lost his property, he calculates that the audience would appreciate his father’s athletic career as a sign of a good citizen (*On the Embassy* 147). In Hellenistic and Roman times there was a mix of richer and poorer athletes in the gymnastic events, while the hippic disciplines remained the domain of the wealthy. (For further discussion of the ongoing scholarly debate about the participation of

nonelites in Greek sport, see Chapter 10 on Athens and Chapter 13 on democratization.)

Wherever Greek sport took place, slaves were present. They accompanied their masters (athletes or spectators) to the great festivals, like the unfortunate Chian slave. And they fulfilled necessary duties as the sanctuary's personnel, cleaning the athletic facilities, preparing the sites, and so on. What they were not doing, however, was participating in the contests – no slave is attested as winner in any athletic event in ancient Greece. A certain amount of confusion in this regard has been produced by a passage in a speech about the Panathenaic Games ascribed (probably erroneously) to the Athenian orator Demosthenes that states “You, therefore, being well aware that slaves and aliens share in the other sports but that dismounting is open only to citizens” (61.23). Some scholars have argued that this passage shows that slaves were allowed to enter some contests in this festival. Crowther, for instance, concluded that slaves took part in all disciplines except the *apobates* race, which involved armed men mounting and dismounting from moving chariots (Crowther 2004: 249). According to Golden, however, the text only makes a distinction between the *apobates* and other hippic events in which slaves served as jockeys and charioteers (Golden 2008: 43).

In *gymnasia* the situation was similar; the exclusion of slaves from training in the *gymnasion* is attested in numerous literary sources and inscriptions, including the aforementioned one from Beroia (for other examples, see Crowther 2004: 247–53). Numerous scenes on Athenian vases depict slaves helping their masters undress before exercise or winding on boxers' thongs. Those slaves seem to belong to the athletes themselves while others formed part of the personnel of *gymnasion*, such as the *palaistrophylakes* who are known from many inscriptions (Golden 2008: 61–7). To clarify the situation, then, it is not precise to say slaves were excluded from the *gymnasion*. They were always there, but they were doing things other than sports. Not the building itself, but undressing and training mark the division between free and slave members of the population.

According to the ritualistic interpretation of Greek sport, which views sport as the ritual sacrifice of physical energy, slaves were excluded because they were seen as inadequate offerings to the gods (Sansone 1988: 118). More convincing is the social historical explanation. Sport had great importance, and athletic victories at the Panhellenic games brought enormous fame, and therefore this valuable source of prestige was restricted to free men.

However, there is, for the Hellenistic (323–31) and the Roman (31 BCE–476 CE) eras, some evidence for the participation of slaves in athletic events. For example, documents from Egypt dated to 257

provide information about the situation of an athlete named Pyrrhos, who was evidently a slave. A wealthy man had offered to pay for Pyrrhos's athletic training if he showed promise, and the director of a training center in the city of Alexandria declared that Pyrrhos did indeed have the potential to be a successful professional athlete (see Golden 2008: 42–3). An inscription from Misthia in Asia Minor dating to the second century CE records a regulation concerning slave victors: “If a slave happens to win, he must give one quarter of his prize money to his fellow competitors” (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 6.449). This was a small festival and, as proven by other regulations, quite a peculiar one. Wrestling was not permitted as part of the *pankraton*, and no athlete was allowed to win more than one victory in a day. Despite the exceptional character of the inscription and the minor importance of Misthia, it is worth noting that slaves obviously took part in this contest (Crowther 2004: 248–9; Golden 2008: 42–3).

There is, nonetheless, no reason to think that even during the Hellenistic and Roman periods slaves participated in Greek sport in any significant numbers. The limited extent to which they were allowed to participate can be understood as “preserving privilege by limited sharing” (Hubbard 2008: 385). Another important factor was that the conquests of Alexander the Great (born 356, died 323) created a situation in which indigenous populations in much of the Near East gradually, but incompletely, assimilated to Greek culture. As part of that process, many athletic festivals were founded in which some if not most participants were professional athletes rather than local residents. This made the social status of participants less of a pressing issue than it had been before. It is noteworthy, and unlikely to be coincidental, that the evidence for the participation of slaves in sport comes largely from areas, such as Egypt and Pisidia, that were first integrated into the Greek cultural sphere in the Hellenistic period (see Christesen 2012: 164–83).

7 Ethnic Groups

Ethnic distinctions in Greek athletics are intricate as well. In Greek literature, it is a commonplace that mankind was divided into Greeks and barbarians (i.e., non-Greeks), but in daily life this division might have had less importance. Barbarians lived in Greek cities, went to the sanctuaries, carried out their business, and took part in social life. Furthermore, no Greek state issued passports or identity cards, so the “Greekness” of someone was a somewhat fluid category. Yet in the

world of athletics being a Greek remained essential; the judges of the Olympics and the other Panhellenic games had to decide if a man who came to compete was to be admitted as a Greek or excluded as a barbarian. The most famous discussion concerning the “Greekness” of an athlete took place in the early fifth century when Macedonia’s king Alexander I wanted to compete at the Olympics. Some competitors tried to have him excluded, but Alexander persuasively claimed that his ancestors were from the impeccably Greek city-state of Argos, and he was judged to be a Greek and allowed to take part in the games (Herodotus 5.22; see also Chapter 22).

After Alexander the Great conquered Egypt in 332, Greco-Macedonian kings from the Ptolemaic dynasty ruled Egypt. Eager for recognition, the Ptolemaic kings won many victories at Olympia and Athens during the third century, most of them in the equestrian events (see Chapter 23). Their agonistic activity is well documented, most notably in a papyrus, published in 2001, which contains 18 poems praising victories in horse and chariot races, all of which were written by Posidippos of Pella, who lived and worked at the court of Ptolemy I and II in the third century (Golden 2008: 17–23; Remijsen 2009).

A passage in Polybius’s *Histories* (27.9) illustrates how athletes and spectators discussed Greek identity in the context of athletic events. The final in the Olympic boxing competition in 212 was a fight between Kleitomachos of Thebes, who had dominated boxing and *pankration* in the preceding years, and Aristonikos of Egypt, who had been carefully selected and trained according to the orders of King Ptolemy IV. (Some people from Egypt were allowed to participate in the Panhellenic games; see Decker 1991.) According to Polybius, Aristonikos was supported by the spectators as the “underdog,” and the crowd loudly acclaimed each of his punches. Kleitomachos supposedly reacted by upbraiding the spectators:

At this time they say that Kleitomachos, after withdrawing for a few moments to recover his breath, turned to the crowd and asked them what they meant by cheering on Aristonikos and backing him up all they could. Did they think he himself was not fighting fairly, or were they not aware that Kleitomachos was now fighting for the glory of Greece and Aristonikos for that of King Ptolemy? Would they prefer to see an Egyptian conquer the Greeks and win the Olympic crown, or to hear a Theban and Boeotian proclaimed by the herald as victor in the men’s boxing-match? When Kleitomachos had spoken thus, they say there was such a change in the sentiment of the crowd that now all was reversed, and Aristonikos was beaten rather by the crowd than by Kleitomachos. (27.9.10–13, trans. W. Paton)

This text is one of a few sources that explore the psychology of spectators at Greek athletic events. What matters here, however, is the ethnic discourse. According to Polybius, Kleitomachos presented himself as the defender of Greek honor against a barbarian, thereby linking the ethnic and the antimonarchical argument. It seems that the official Olympic definition of “Greekness” was not appreciated by some spectators who had a different idea of ethnic identity.

Less attention has been paid to the admission of Romans to the Panhellenic games. In 228 the Corinthians allowed Romans to participate in the Isthmian Games (Polybius 2.12.8); the other festivals seem to have followed Corinth shortly after. Formally this was justified because the Romans were included in Greek mythological genealogies, but the real motive was political. The sanctuaries were trying to put themselves on good terms with the new power from the West. It should be noted that the admission was more symbolic than practical, since there is not much evidence for the participation of Romans during the Republic (which collapsed in 31 BCE). It was during the Empire (31 BCE–476 CE) that Romans started to become a relevant group in Greek athletics.

In sum, in the world of athletics over the centuries, social differences were (re)produced, discussed, sometimes enhanced, and sometimes obliterated.

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 For more on *spondophoroi* and the Olympic truce, and on the relationship between Elis and Olympia, see Chapter 8 in this volume. On the officials active at Olympia, see Sinn 2004: 104–10 and (on the *Hellandikai* specifically) Romano 2007.
- 3 Relatively little is known about the Olympic Council (*Olympike boule*), and how it functioned. See Sinn 2004: 110–11.
- 4 Philostratus’s *Gymnastikos* (second or third century CE) purports to be an instruction manual for athletic trainers, but there is no firm basis for assuming that the author had practical experience himself. The text can be understood as a piece of rhetoric praising the good old times of Greek athletics (König 2005: 301–44). Nevertheless, different concepts of physical training can be extracted from the book. Philostratus heavily criticizes the four-day cycle some trainers followed. In his opinion the rigid order of preparation, intensive training, relaxation, and moderate training was a menace to an athlete’s health (41); he preferred training methods adapted to the

athlete's temperament and constitution.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For the infrastructure and the organization of the Olympic Games, see

Decker 1997; Miller 2004a: 31–128; and Sinn 2004. On the *Hellanodikai*, see Romano 2007.

Nicholson 2005 analyzes the role of jockeys, charioteers, and trainers in the sixth and fifth century, incorporating both literary and archaeological data. Raschke 1985 collects the evidence for the role of musicians in Greek athletics.

On spectatorship at Greek athletic events, see Crowther 2004: 35–50, 229–40 and Kyle 1984. On intellectual activity at Greek athletic festivals, see Kokolakis 1992.

Golden 1998, a profound and well-written study about the discourse of difference in Greek athletics, looks at age categories as well as at divisions of sex and class. While this book focuses on the Archaic and Classical periods, Golden 2008 includes the Hellenistic and Roman periods and offers numerous insights into chronological developments. Concerning the social background of Greek athletes, Pleket 2001 is the decisive study, though see also Poliakoff 1987: 127–33. Young 1984 refutes the classicist view of Greek athletics as “gentlemen’s sport.” See now also Christesen 2012: 135–83; Fisher 1998 and 2011; and Pritchard 2003 and 2004.

Crowther 2004: 247–53 and Hubbard 2008 offer new ideas about the role of slaves in Greek athletics.

CHAPTER 18

The Greek Stadium as a Reflection of a Changing Society

Stephen G. Miller

1 Introduction

Despite Homeric and romantic images of purely natural settings for Greek sport, historical Greek games required physical facilities, most essentially the stadium, which needed to be designed, built, and maintained.¹ As sport became increasingly popular in the Greek world over the course of the Archaic (700–480), Classical (480–323), and Hellenistic (323–31)² periods, athletic facilities for practice and competition became more specialized and more monumental. (On facilities other than stadia, see Chapter 19 in this volume.) This essay will suggest that the design and spread (see [Map 18.1](#)) of stadia and related facilities in the fifth through third centuries had social and historical stimuli.

2 The Form of the Greek Stadium

Greek tracks were rectangular in shape ([Figure 18.1](#); see also Miller 2004a: figs. 34 (stadium at Olympia) and 35 (stadium at Delphi)), and ancient footraces were run up and down the track with turns made around posts (Miller 1980b, 2004a: figs. 63–7). Modern-day tracks are fundamentally different in design because competitors run around the outside of an oval and execute turns by running through curves, not by turning around posts. The typical Greek stadium was one *stadion*

(600 feet) long; since measures of length varied from place to place in ancient Greece, stadia also varied in length. For example, the track at Olympia was 192 meters long, whereas that at Delphi was 177 meters. The width of tracks was not standardized and varied between 23.5 and 32.2 meters. The surface of the track sloped toward one end so that water could flow from one end of the track to the other in stone channels that lined the track's edges. The purpose of the water is not known, although drinking and wetting the track are likely, and not mutually exclusive. Nor is it known why the track between the water channels is typically wider at the center than at the ends. Theories include better visibility for the spectators, greater safety for the spectators when the javelin and discus were thrown, and so on. We may infer from the slope, which was usually about 2 percent, that the ancient concern was not with a track that would be ideal for setting time records. It seems to have been sufficient that conditions be the same for all competitors.

Map 18.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.

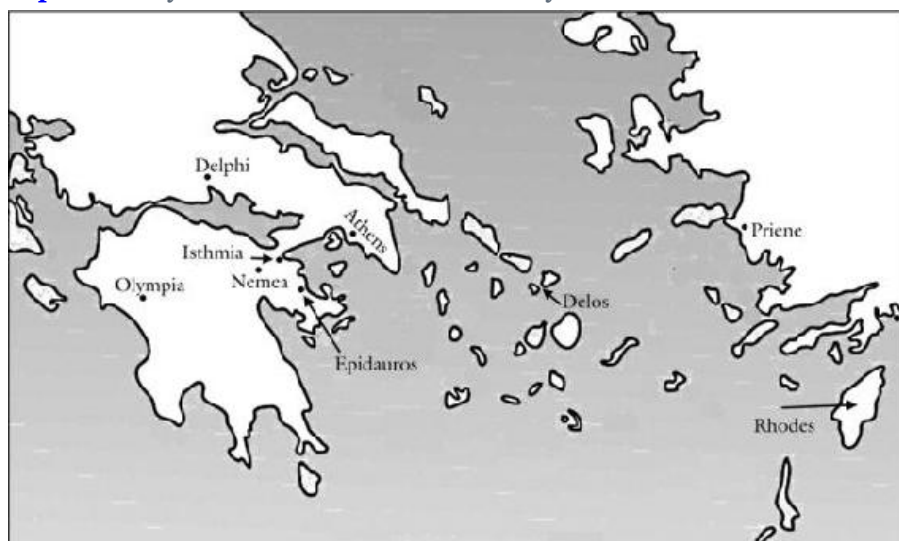


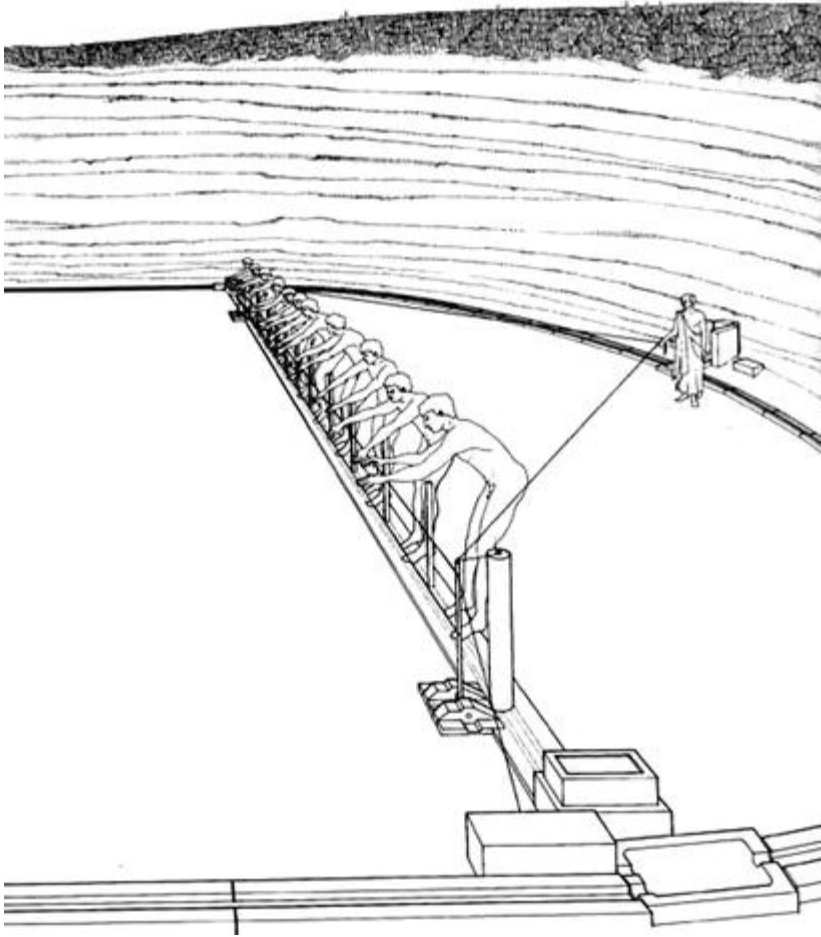
Figure 18.1 View of the Nemea stadium (c.330–320 BCE) from the southeast with the starting line and tunnel entrance leading west to the *apodyterion*. Source: Photograph by Stephen Miller. Used with permission.



3 The Introduction of the *Hysplex*

At each end of the track was a line of stone blocks set almost flush with the ground. This was the *balbis* or starting line, which characteristically had sockets for wooden posts that defined the lanes, and a parallel pair of grooves in which runners placed their toes for the start of races (Miller 2004a: figs. 36–7). Set into this line or in front of it was a starting mechanism, or *hysplex*, that worked on the principle of the catapult (see [Figure 18.2](#) as well as Miller 2004a: figs. 51, 54–5 and Valavanis 1999). This mechanism, however, only came into existence around 320. It was, in various forms, a standard part of the stadium thereafter. Its purpose seems to have been to ensure that no runner could gain an advantage by starting early and to remove any element of subjectivity wherein a judge might wrongly accuse a runner of a false start.³ This emphasis on the creation of identical conditions for all competitors was, along with objective criteria for determining outcomes, a hallmark of the ancient Olympics. The only events were those in which all could see who crossed the finish line first, who threw the javelin or the discus the farthest, and so on. Musical competitions where a panel of judges decided the winner were not a part of the ancient Olympics (nor were figure skating, diving, synchronized swimming, and so on) (Miller 2004a: 19, 232–3).

Figure 18.2 Drawing of the starting line with toe grooves and reconstructed *hysplex* mechanism at Nemea. Source: From S. Miller, *Excavations at Nemea II: The Early Hellenistic Stadium* (2001), fig. 91. Used with permission.



It is significant that the *hysplex* mechanism became a fixture in the stadium during or just after the lifetime of Alexander the Great, for it is exactly at this time that we can trace in our written sources the advent of a new element in society: the athlete as professional entertainer (Miller 2004a: 196–206). Athletics is entertaining first and foremost because the outcome is unknown. The favorite might always be upset, and we can cheer for the underdog because there is always the hope of the unexpected. Identical conditions for all competitors and objective criteria for determining victory ensured that famous athletes were not given preferential treatment, which in turn enhanced the possibility of surprise that make athletics so attractive as entertainment. In this context we may note that the most severe penalties at Olympia were meted out to athletes who gave or accepted

bribes. *Zanes*, bronze statues of Zeus (Miller 2004a: fig. 173), paid for with the fines levied on such athletes and documenting their guilt, were set at the entrance to the stadium as a warning to the athletes of the future that they were not to “fix” the outcome of contests (Pausanias 5.21.2–18).

4 Vaulted Entrance Tunnels

It is also at the time of Alexander that another architectural feature was added to the stadium, and one that speaks again to the newly specialized status of the athlete: the entrance tunnel roofed by a barrel vault or, as Pausanias called it at Olympia, the *krypte esodos*, the “hidden entrance” (Miller 2001: 190–210, 222; 2004a: figs. 173–5). The name is appropriate, for the entrance is all but invisible from most places in the stadium. The effect of an athlete’s sudden emergence from the tunnel onto the floor of the stadium must have been dramatic.

The discovery of the vaulted tunnel at Nemea (see [Figure 18.3](#) as well as Miller 2004a: figs. 198–9; 1980a, and 2001: 62–83), complete with graffiti (Miller 2001: 84–9), was significant for our knowledge of the history of architecture because it could be dated securely to around 320 whereas the vault at Olympia was reworked in Roman times, and its original construction date obscured. Hence, Nemea clearly shows that ancient Greek architects knew and used the vault. But the vaulted entrance is even more significant as a statement of the clear separation of athlete from spectator; the former now came into the stadium by his own unique entrance.

Figure 18.3 The vaulted entrance to the Nemea stadium, c.320 BCE, with the track at the far end. *Source:* Photograph by Stephen Miller. Used with permission.

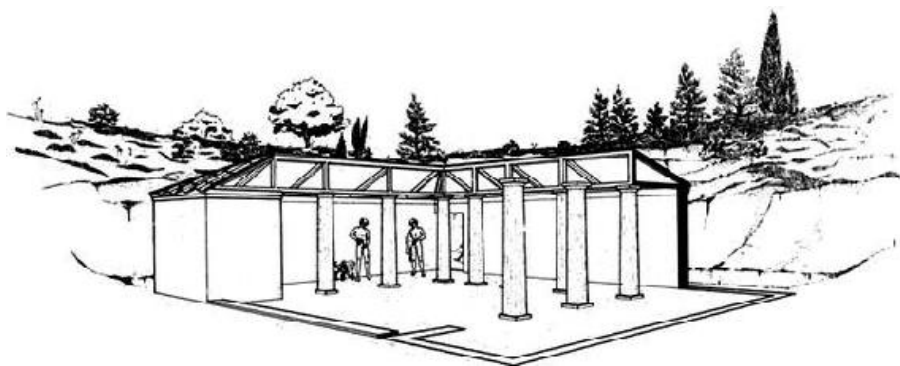


The existence of a separate entrance for the athlete suggests that it served to connect the stadium with something at the other end. Again, Nemea revealed that to have been, not surprisingly, the locker room or “undressing room” (*apodyterion*). At Nemea, this was a simple, nearly square structure, with a Doric colonnade on three sides and the center open to the sky (see [Figure 18.4](#) as well as Miller 2004a: fig. 197 and 2001: 139–77). It was here that the athlete readied himself for competition, oiling his body, psyching himself up, and donning the ancient Greek athletic “uniform” of nudity (see Chapter 13, which includes an excursus on athletic nudity). It was here that he was separated from the crowd and here that he prepared for his role as entertainer. In other words, in the period of Alexander, we see for the first time a building complex consisting of a stadium, a tunnel entrance, and a locker room. Led on by the discoveries at Nemea, we now know that at roughly the same time the same tripartite unit came into existence at Olympia, Athens, and Epidauros (Miller 2001: 177–223), and probably many other sites still to be excavated (most notably Isthmia).

5 Formal Seating for Spectators

There was, however, yet another development that shows the increasing separation of athlete and spectator: formal seating for the latter. In the stadium constructed at Olympia around 350, permanent seats were restricted to those for the judges (on the south side of the track) and that for the priestess of Demeter (on the opposite side), with simple grassy slopes for the other thousands of spectators (Miller 2004a: figs. 34, 176). In the stadium built at Nemea c.330 the slopes of the hillside into which the stadium was cut again show no permanent seats (see [Figure 18.1](#)). However, there is a permanent bench for the judges along the eastern side of the track, and three rows of stone seats were erected next to the western water channel between the starting line and the passageway to the entrance tunnel. One supposes that those were for athletes, trainers, family, and so on, but obviously not for the crowd as a whole.

Figure 18.4 Drawing of a cutaway restoration of the *apodyterion* at Nemea. The vaulted entrance tunnel lies behind the building and was approached through the door at the southeast corner of the building (here center rear). *Source:* From S. Miller, *The Ancient Stadium at Nemea: A Self-Guided Tour* (1994), p. 7. Used with permission.



Sometime around the end of the third century, clusters of stone seats were added to the earth embankments in the stadium at Epidauros (Miller 2004a: figs. 213–6). These seats are located on either side of the track, near the end of the track at which footraces finished. (The races always finished at the same end so that the *stadion* race would begin at the far end, while the double *stadion* race, the *diaulos*, started at one end, turned at the far end, and finished where it had begun.) The position of these stone seats was also probably influenced by the location of the competitions in jumping, wrestling, boxing, and the *pankration*, which were held in the stadium, almost certainly in or near the area where the stone seats were built. The

existence of these seats shows that attention was beginning to be given to the audience.

By the second century, the use of stone seats throughout the stadium had become standard, as in the case of the stadium at Rhodes (Valavanis 2004: fig. 578). From then on the architectural separation of spectator from athlete-entertainer is the norm. In the second century CE, for example, Herodes Atticus, a wealthy benefactor of several Greek sites, added stone seats to the stadium at Delphi (Pausanias 10.32.1; Miller 2004a: fig. 35), but they are raised nearly 2 meters above the track with a solid stone wall facing onto the track below the seats. The spectator is elevated above the “stage,” and episodes that were known from earlier days, when spectators might run out onto the track, or athletes run into the audience, became an impossibility.⁴

6 Civic Stadia

Finally, there was one more development in the Hellenistic period that is of interest. This is the emergence of what has been called the “civic stadium.” By the second century it is clear that a new architectural form has developed. We see this at a number of sites, including Priene (Miller 2001: 223–4, fig. 362; 2004a: figs. 261, 267) and Delos (Miller 2001: 223; 2004a: 182–5, fig. 266). It stands in a different tradition from the grand stadia at Panhellenic sanctuaries such as Olympia, Nemea, and elsewhere. It had, as always, the one-*stadion*-long track, but it was typically built against a slope with a cluster of permanent seats only on the uphill side, and with a covered track parallel to the stadium track but above the seats. Most tellingly, these stadia were physically attached to square structures called *palaistrai* and hence formed part of *gymnasia* (on which, see Chapter 19). In this context, the stadium track is a place for everyday exercise and practice (with the covered track or *xystos* used in bad weather). It becomes a place of public competition only on the occasion of civic celebrations when the young men would display their accomplishments to the citizen body, including parents who were “entertained” on a most personal level as sons vied to be the best of their city.

The “civic stadium” is yet another manifestation of the changing priorities of Greek society. After Alexander, and especially with the growth of Roman power, most city-states abandoned, perforce, their international ambitions and turned to a more fundamental priority: the self-rejuvenation of their towns, which would depend upon the development of the minds and bodies of their youth. In such a context,

the stadium is not the place for meetings of large crowds from around the ancient world, but rather a place of preparation for the citizen-to-be, and that role is reflected in the architecture that survives to us.

NOTES

1 On the preparation of facilities, including the stadium, at Delphi for the Pythian Games, see *Corpus des Inscriptions de Delphes* 2.139, which is translated in Miller 2004b: no. 81 and discussed at the beginning of Chapter 17. On the contract for the building of a starting mechanism (*hysplex*) at Epidauros, see *Inscriptiones Graecae* IV² 1 98; for an English translation see Miller 2004b: no. 82.

2 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

3 Before the use of the *hysplex* races began with an oral signal and false starters were flogged (see, for example, Herodotus 8.59).

4 Perhaps the most famous example was in the fifth century when Kallipateira of Rhodes disguised herself as a male trainer so she could see her son compete at Olympia. When he won, she jumped out onto the track and inadvertently revealed her gender (Pausanias 5.6.7–8). Her older brothers did the opposite; when they were victorious, they ran into the crowd to grab their father, Diagoras, who was himself an Olympic victor, and put him on their shoulders as they took their victory lap (Pausanias 6.7.1–5). It would have been very difficult, perhaps impossible, for them to have done that in the type of stadium that was typical 500 years later.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

On stadia and starting lines in general, see Miller 2004a: 33–45, which includes numerous helpful photos and figures. Director of the excavations at Nemea for many years, Miller has published both guidebooks and extensive archaeological reports on Nemea. For the stadium at Nemea, see Miller 1992, 2001, and 2002. For details of the discovery and reconstruction of the starting mechanism, Valavanis 1999 is essential. Valavanis 2004: 304–35 provides a well-illustrated overview of the sanctuary, stadium, and games at Nemea.

For authoritative, illustrated syntheses on Greek athletics, see Miller 2004a and Valavanis 2004. For brief treatments of Olympia, see Sinn 2000 and Swaddling 2008.

CHAPTER 19

The Social Life of Greek Athletic Facilities (other than Stadia)

Michael Scott

1 Introduction: Casting the Net Wide

In his work on sport in ancient Athens, Donald Kyle (1987: 56) defines athletic facilities as follows: “An athletic facility applies to any site, with or without architectural embellishment, that was the location, occasionally or regularly, of athletics in either the preparatory or competitive stage.” Kyle’s open-ended definition recognizes the important fact that ancient Greek athletic activity took place in many different spatial settings, none of which had a fixed and stable architectural form. In this essay, I look at some of the ways in which spaces used for athletic competition and training, as well as those spaces associated with the hosting of large sporting events, were articulated, and ask what was the meaning and use of their spatial indeterminacy for the social life of athletic facilities in the Archaic (700–480) and Classical (480–323) periods.¹ We will see that it was only in the fourth century that spaces for competition and training began to develop a high degree of architectural elaboration and that there was always a great deal of variation with respect to the spaces and structures in which competition and training took place.

2 Spaces for Competition

In Chapter 18 in this volume Stephen Miller examines the

development of the stadium as a place of competition. Yet, as he indicates, it was not the earliest, nor only, place in which competitions were held. Even after the architectural elaboration of stadia as “the place” for athletic competition, different sorts of structures, other parts of sanctuaries, and multipurpose civic spaces could still be used. For example, no stadium has been found in the city of Larissa, home to the Eleutheria festival; there was instead an open-air, horseshoe shaped structure (Gallis 1998: 231). At Olympia, it would appear that wrestling, boxing, and *pankration* competitions were held not in the stadium but in the sanctuary (known as the *Altis*), in a spot called the *theatron* (“viewing area,” see Xenophon *Hellenika* 7.4.29 and Scott 2010: 188–9). A street in the Spartan *agora* (marketplace) was called the *dromos* (“track,” see Pausanias 3.14.6–7 and Sanders 2009), possibly indicating its continuing use as a place of athletic competition. Kyle (1987: 57–64; 2007: 168–70) has argued that the Athenian *agora* continued to be used as a place of athletic and equestrian competition through the fourth century. An important feature of the space of athletic competition in Archaic and Classical Greece was, therefore, the fact that it had no set place or architectural form.

The same applies even when particular kinds of competitions required particular kinds of spaces. Horse-racing events, for example, needed large spaces. Yet well into the fourth century hippodromes seem to have remained simply sufficiently large areas of open ground, which were neither architecturally elaborated nor indeed permanently maintained as spaces for competition. At Delos in the fifth century the hippodrome was an open area of ground in the northeast part of the island, which, when not in use for horse racing, was rented out as pasture land (Bruneau and Ducat 2005: 248). At Athens the hippodrome is first attested in the fourth century in the work of Xenophon (*Hipparchikos* 3.10), who refers to its open, simple nature without any barriers to stop people getting in the way of the events and military exercises that went on there. There is, moreover, good reason to think that the Athenian hippodrome was never architecturally elaborated (Kyle 1987: 96–7). The impermanence of hippodromes may in fact have been something the Greeks counted on. Miller (2004a: 93) has argued that hippodromes were often located in flood plains, so that the annual floods would provide them with a new level of river gravel to act as a track.

Moreover, multipurpose civic space could also be used for horse races, just as for other kinds of athletic competition. In Elis there seems not to have been a specific hippodrome area, or built structure, and the *agora* was used into the Classical period as a place of pre-Olympic horse training (Pausanias 6.24.1–2). Indeed, although we

know from literary sources that hippodromes existed in many places such as Athens, Olympia, Delphi, and Alexandria, the only excavated example to demonstrate tangible architectural elaboration (at Mt Lykaion in Arcadia), oddly, seems to have incorporated the stadium inside it (see Chapter 11 and Romano 2005).²

Different kinds of space and structures also developed for hosting the musical, poetical, and theatrical competitions associated with many athletic festivals. At Isthmia, for instance, a theater that was originally built in the fifth century was reconstructed as part of the rebuilding of the sanctuary after 390 and was remodeled substantially at the time of the sanctuary's expansion after 350 (Gebhard 1973: 26–7, 60, 141). However, yet again, no particular kind of architectural space was strictly necessary. At Athens, for example, the musical and rhapsodic competitions of the Panathenaic Games were held both in the Theater of Dionysus and in the open space of the *agora* (Neils 1992b: 18). Moreover, at Delphi, where the musical contests were considered the most important part of the Pythian festival, we have no idea where those contests were held before the third century, when they took place in the stadium. By the second century they had been moved to the theater sited above the temple (Bommelaer 1991: 207–12, 216; Valavanis 2004: 194).

The picture painted here is thus one of a series of non-architecturally elaborated, non-uniform, and non-activity-specific spaces being used as arenas for the conduct of all kinds of sporting and associated musical and theatrical competitions in the Archaic and Classical periods. This spatial indeterminacy, architectural poverty, and variation seem to have constituted the norm for Archaic and Classical Greek competitions, even for the great festivals at Olympia and Delphi.

3 Spaces for Preparation

Spaces for athletic competition could also include, and be joined to, spaces for athletic preparation. This could mean spaces for last-minute preparations immediately preceding the moment of competition. In Chapter 18, Miller described the creation at Nemea in the late fourth century of a stadium and entrance tunnel connected to an *apodyterion* (“undressing room”), consisting of a simple Doric colonnade on three sides with the center open to the sky (Miller 2001: 139–224). At Olympia, starting in the Hellenistic period, athletes’ last-minute preparations took place in the narrow space between the Echo Stoa and the stadium, allowing them quick access to the famed entrance

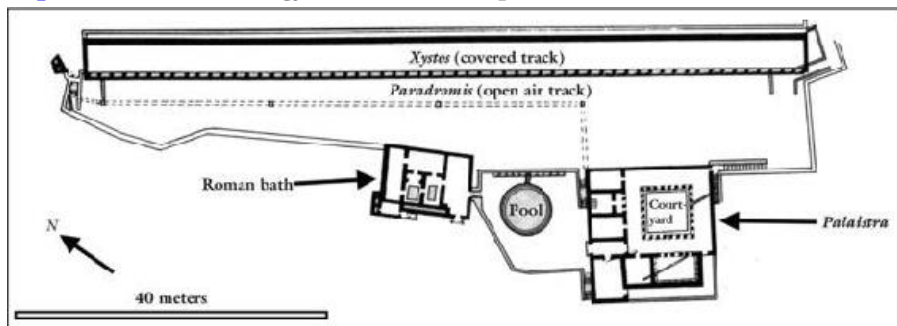
tunnel to the stadium. This space was partly open to the sky and partly roofed (Miller 2001: 190–210). There is, however, no evidence that built spaces for such last-minute preparations existed, either at Olympia or elsewhere, before the fourth century.

Spaces for athletes to bathe and clean themselves were also available at many of the sites of athletic competition, and once again they varied across a spectrum of architectural sophistication. At Olympia, most people would presumably have used the nearby Kladeos River for bathing, but increasingly elaborate bath structures were built starting in the fifth century (Kunze and Schleif 1944: 32–69; Hoffmann 1999: 157–63). At Delphi, baths were built in the late fourth century as part of the new *gymnasion* structure (Hoffmann 1999: 116–20). At Nemea, two bathing rooms were built at the sanctuary at roughly the same time as those at Delphi (Miller 1992). At Isthmia, second-century CE bath structures were built over what is presumed to be earlier, possibly Classical period baths (Gregory 1995).

Two important athletic spaces, in which athletic competition did not take place, but which were instead reserved for training and exercise, were the *gymnasion* and the *palaistra* (Miller 2004a: 176–9). The vast majority of Greeks who participated in sport never entered high-level competitions such as those at Olympia, and much of their athletic activity took place in these spaces, which thus represent arguably the most important sites for ancient Greek sport.

Before discussing the physical appearance of *gymnasia* and *palaistrai*, it is important to note that it is difficult to ascertain their precise form. One problem, as Petermandl points out in Chapter 14, is that Greeks did not consistently differentiate between the two. It is, therefore, not surprising that modern-day scholars have argued over what exactly distinguished a *gymnasion* from a *palaistra* (Glass 1988; Kyle 1987: 66–7). Another issue is that although the architectural form of the *palaistra* is described in detail by Vitruvius, who was active in the first century (Vitruvius 6.2; for an English translation see Miller 2004b: no. 179), we have yet to find an archaeological example that conforms to his description. Evidence is yet another source of complication; the material and literary record for *gymnasia* and *palaistrai* from before the fourth century is far from voluminous and does not offer a great deal of insight into details of their appearance. The earliest, relevant, substantive physical remains are those of the *gymnasion* from Delphi, which dates to the mid-fourth century. Finally and perhaps most importantly, there was a great deal of temporal and spatial variation in the form these spaces took. Here again we encounter a high degree of indeterminacy.³

Map 19.1 Plan of the *gymnasion* at Delphi.



The Greek *gymnasion*, literally a “place for nude exercise,” was a multiuse facility for recreation, exercise, athletic practice, and physical education. As a key site for physical education, it was occasionally the home of formally organized athletic competitions for young males. However, most formally organized competitions were held elsewhere, typically in stadia that were built in physically separate spaces, and so no provisions were made to accommodate large numbers of spectators. (On stadia, see Chapter 18, and note Miller’s comments on the integration of stadia into some later *gymnasia*.) A standard feature of any sizeable Greek community (Pausanias 10.4.1), *gymnasia* were built at public expense (frequently with financial assistance from wealthy citizens) and maintained by civic officials. The origins and use of *gymnasia* (in relationship to training for hoplite warfare, nudity, growing enthusiasm for athletics, social life, etc.) are still debated (see Chapter 13, which includes an excursus on athletic nudity). The earliest *gymnasia* seem to have come into being in the sixth century, as natural sites at the edges of towns suitable for exercise because they offered open space, water, and shade. (They perhaps had running tracks but any fixed constructions were associated with shrines and altars to various local heroes and deities.) *Gymnasia* became increasingly numerous and received significantly more architectural embellishment over the course of the centuries that followed. The construction of relatively elaborate physical structures means that we need to differentiate between physical setting (large, park-like areas) and architectural form (structures used for athletic and other purposes), both of which could be described as *gymnasia*.

The architectural form of the *gymnasion* as it developed over the course of time tended to have two basic components: running tracks and an enclosed, rectangular building called a *palaestra* (literally a “place for wrestling”). (Map 19.1 shows a plan of the *gymnasion* at Delphi; for a plan of Delphi as a whole, see Map 11.2.) There were typically two tracks (*dromoi*, singular *dromos*), one in the open air (the

paradromis) and one that was roofed (the *xystos*). Individual sports associated with what we call track and field, such as running and throwing the discus and javelin, were practiced in and around the *dromoi*. Combat sports, such as boxing and wrestling, were practiced in a *palaistra*, which was usually located close to the *dromoi*. *Palaistrai* were characteristically rectangular, with blank outside walls and an interior courtyard framed by colonnades that provided shaded walkways. The courtyard was left unpaved and served as a space in which to practice the combat sports, and rooms behind the framing colonnades provided spaces for changing, bathing, storage, and so on. Over the course of time *gymnasia* became increasingly associated with education of the mind as well as the body (see Chapter 14) and many later *palaistrai* include rooms for that purpose. It was frequently the case that a large room was built on the north side of the building and provided with benches in order to serve as classroom space.

Palaistrai could also be built as stand-alone spaces. This type of *palaistra*, which, owing to the absence of *dromoi*, required much less space than *gymnasia*, was usually located closer to the center of towns than *gymnasia*, which tended to be built on the outskirts of communities. Stand-alone *palaistrai* were often privately owned by individuals (Morison 2000) who made a living as athletic trainers (*paidotribai*) for young males, but nonetheless seem to have remained for the most part open to the public.

Gymnasia and *palaistrai* were also features at many sanctuaries in which major athletic festivals were held. However, the earliest for which we have evidence of its architectural construction is that at Delphi (Glass 1988: 167). The *gymnasion* at Delphi was an elaborate complex that included two parallel tracks (one of which was covered), a *palaistra*, and several basins and cisterns for washing, to which were added even more sophisticated bathing facilities in later periods (Bommelaer 1991: 72–9; Jannoray 1953; Miller 2004a: 99–100; Valavanis 2004: 240–3). A *palaistra*, constructed around the same time or slightly later, has been found at Epidauros (Miller 2004a: 129–32; though cf. Winter 2006: 123), and a *palaistra* was also constructed on Delos in the early third century (Bruneau and Ducat 2005: 242). Athletes at Olympia had to wait even longer for formal practice facilities; no evidence has been found for a *palaistra* or *gymnasion* in the Classical period. It was only in the late third century that King Ptolemy II paid for the construction of a *gymnasion* complex there (Valavanis 2004: 99, 130–5; Wacker 1996: 15–78). No built structures at Isthmia and Nemea have been identified with a *gymnasion* or *palaistra* of the Classical period. It is presumed that preparatory training and exercise in all of these sanctuaries during the Archaic and Classical periods must have taken place in any available open space.

Gymnasia and *palaistrai* were also to be found in cities, the best attested of which are Athens's three major *gymnasia*, the Academy, the Lyceum, and the Kynosarges. Our archaeological knowledge of the architectural elements of these structures before the Hellenistic period is minimal. The Academy began as a sacred grove, its boundaries delimited by *horoi* (marker stones) from at least 500. Plutarch recounts how Kimon, in the fifth century, converted "the Academy from a waterless and arid spot into a well-watered grove, which he provided with clear running-tracks and shady walks" (*Kimon* 13.7, trans. B. Perrin). The architectural elaboration of its athletic structures may have begun, like at Delphi, in the late fourth century, to which period the remains of a large open peristyle court have been dated. It is, however, impossible to be certain of the athletic function of this building. It was not until the Late Hellenistic or even Roman period that an actual *gymnasion* structure can be identified, complete with *palaistra*, baths, and dressing rooms (Kyle 1987: 71–2).

At the Lyceum, the earliest architectural remains of a *gymnasion* are even more heavily disputed, although there is general agreement that there was a built structure from the time of Pericles, which was later enhanced by Lycurgus (Kyle 1987: 77–84). The evidence regarding the Kynosarges *gymnasion* is also inconclusive, especially regarding its architectural construction. Plutarch (*Themistokles* 1.3) comments that a young Themistokles, in the last quarter of the sixth century, encouraged young Athenian citizens from good families to exercise with him there, therefore ending the place's association with *nothoi* (people of mixed descent and hence of lower status, for further discussion, see Kyle 1987: 88–92). A *gymnasion* structure must have been built there by the middle of the fourth century (Demosthenes 24.114), but the whole complex never seems to have attained the architectural elaboration of the Academy or Lyceum.

The Lyceum, Academy, and Kynosarges were all built at the margins of the city, outside of the fortification walls (Valavanis 2004: 379; Wycherley 1978: 230). Their locations were principally governed by the need to be near water, hence their position alongside rivers, as well as by the need for a large amount of open, relatively flat ground. Their marginality contrasts with the later tradition of placing *gymnasia*, and sometimes even stadia, within the city walls (Winter 2006: 120). At Athens, that contrast is especially clear, given that during the Hellenistic period at least one and possibly two *gymnasia* were constructed in the center of the city, not far from the Roman *agora* (Kyle 1987: 58; Miller 1995: 203–9).

Athens was also well stocked with *palaistrai*, which served as loci for athletic activity and philosophical discussion. In Plato's *Lysis* (203a–4e), for example, Socrates stops at a new *palaistra* en route

from the Academy to the Lyceum and is invited in for philosophical debate, and the Old Oligarch (2.10) complains about the number of private *palaistrai* in the city (for further examples, see Pritchard 2003: 300–6).

What roles, apart from exercise, did these spaces perform in Athenian society? Many of these roles are treated in detail in other chapters in this volume, and I review them only in brief here. Petermandl's essay, Chapter 14, highlights the role of *gymnasia* and *palaistrai* in the education of young males, and Lear's essay, Chapter 15, demonstrates that *gymnasia* and *palaistrai* were key sites for homoerotic activity. Delorme (1960: 9–32) was among the first to argue for the connection between the development of athletic facilities like *gymnasia* and the need to produce citizens fit for military activity. Indeed Crowther (2007: 75) argues that this was the motivation for their architectural development, with *gymnasia* only later becoming primarily athletic spaces, as sport became an end in itself (cf. however, the skeptical comments in Christesen 2007b and Kyle 1987: 64–6). Pritchard has similarly argued that investment in many local athletic festivals and their facilities helped to blur the lines between sport, the civic system of education, and military training (2003: 300, 2009).

Gymnasia and *palaistrai* also played a role in both reinforcing and destabilizing social class (Fisher 1998: 85; 101–3; 2011; Pritchard 2009: 216, 218, 229). Wealthy individuals, by lavishing resources on these structures and spaces, could enhance their social and political status (Kyle 2007: 100); Kimon, for example, embellished the Academy (Plutarch *Kimon* 13.7). At the same time, *gymnasia* and *palaistrai* were thought to house strong democratic (indeed revolutionary) sentiment (e.g., Athenaeus 13.602; Plutarch *Aratos* 6.4).

Spaces for athletic preparation in the Archaic and Classical world, therefore, whether within sanctuaries or city-states, seem, just as with spaces of athletic competition, to have been largely unelaborated architecturally at least till the second half of the fourth century, and many until much later. Even the famous *gymnasia* at Athens were for a long period nothing more than open rustic spaces, with varying degrees of architectural elaboration centered around certain cult altars, and were all located at marginal spaces outside the city.

4 Spaces and Structures for

Hosting Athletic Competitions

Many additional structures, which had a range of functions associated with preparing and hosting athletic competitions, grew up at sites of famous athletic festivals. There was a plethora of different buildings linked, for example, to the administration of athletic games (such as the *bouleuterion* and *prytaneion* at Olympia, on which see Mallwitz 1972: 125–8; Miller 1978: 235–9; Scott 2010: 158–60; and Sinn 2000: 81, 91–3). There were also guesthouses such as the Leonidaion at Olympia (named after the individual who paid for its construction in the fourth century, see Mallwitz 1972: 246 and Sinn 2000: 96).

Yet once again not all places of athletic competition boasted such structures. At Delphi, for example, no guesthouse has been discovered. In part this is because the sanctuary itself was surrounded by the town of Delphi where accommodation could surely be found. But equally most scholars envisage that, just as at Olympia, the majority of visitors would bring tents to sleep in, turning the hilly landscape surrounding the sanctuary into a noisy backdrop of twinkling camp fires (on Delphi, see Amandry 1990; on Olympia, see Weiler 1997). Dio Chrysostom (8.9) relates that Isthmia often had trouble accommodating spectators, and there can be no doubt that, far from being organized and ordered events, large athletic competitions, such as those at Olympia and Delphi, could be extremely unpleasant experiences. Aelian (*Historical Miscellany* 14.18) recounts that a slave, having misbehaved, was threatened with the punishment of being sent to attend the Olympic Games.

This sense of the social realities of these events reminds us that large athletic festivals were also important socioeconomic events, which often tested a host's abilities to the extreme. There were a considerable number of activities involved in preparing for, hosting, and cleaning up at such festivals, employing people and spaces both linked to, and sometimes far away from, the sites of athletic competition as well as a temporal frame that could extend up to years in advance of any athletic competition. The discussion of this much wider range of spaces associated with athletic events is, however, difficult, given the inconclusive nature of much of the evidence. (For attempts to discuss these issues, see Decker 1997; Miller 2004a: 113–28; and Sinn 2000: 83–90.) I outline here just a few examples of the kinds of things that need to be considered.

First, the preparation of the athletic spaces themselves. At Delphi the sanctuary administrators inscribed for public view a long list of tasks that needed to be performed in the run-up to the Pythian Games (*Corpus des Inscriptions de Delphes* 2.139, which is translated in Miller

2004b: no. 81 and discussed at the beginning of Mann's essay in Chapter 17 of this volume): cleaning, digging, leveling, purchasing of white sand, fencing, and so on. The materials needed to be sourced, their transport organized, and the work undertaken and overseen, all of which involved a chain of people and places outside of the athletic space.

Second, the hosting of the games. Large festivals like those at Olympia and Delphi may have attracted up to forty thousand visitors. Many of their needs could be catered for through the local landscape (Olympia had a river nearby as did Nemea, Delphi had water sources coming down from the mountains, and large reservoirs were built at Isthmia after the middle of the fourth century), or by private enterprise (most people, as we have seen, seem to have brought their own tents to sleep in, and food was supplied either by the spectators or by local vendors who set up stalls at the festivals). Yet the festival organizers were still responsible for supplies, particularly for sacrifices associated with the athletic festivals and for the prizes awarded at the games. The Olympics featured a sacrifice of 100 oxen (Pindar *Olympian* 10.73–8), and a similar number of cows were sacrificed at the Great Panathenaia in Athens (Neils 1992b: 13). These animals had to be fed and watered up to the point of sacrifice, creating an entire economy that significantly extended a festival's temporal and geographical frame. Moreover, at the festival, these animals had to be sacrificed, their carcasses butchered, their meat cooked and distributed, and their remains cleaned up. Renfrew (1988: 180; see Pausanias 5.14.1) has argued that the smell and flies must have been, in the middle of summer, a major problem.

In Athens, large amounts of oil had to be supplied to be used as prizes for the winning competitors at the Panathenaic Games. Aristotle tells us special arrangements were made for ensuring that enough oil was available for this purpose (*Constitution of the Athenians* 60.1).⁴

Such supply issues, involving spaces far removed from the site of competition itself, continued through the Classical and well into the Hellenistic period and beyond. In the second century, for example, the city of Parion erected an inscription giving thanks to the city officials who managed to ensure the supply of food for the New Panathenaia (SIG³ 596).

5 The Meaning and Use of Spatial Indeterminacy

It is evident from the preceding discussion that throughout the Archaic and Classical periods there was an enormous amount of variation in the sites where athletic competition and training took place, and in the architectural provisions at such sites. In this section, I want to think about the meaning and use of that spatial indeterminacy for our understanding of the social life of athletic facilities.

In many ways, we should not be surprised by the fact that athletic activities took place in architecturally unelaborated and multipurpose spaces, especially those spaces that were also used for religious and political activities. Sport, particularly the kinds of sports practiced by the Greeks (running, wrestling, horse racing, etc.), was, after all, not an activity that required very much in the way of built structures. Moreover, in ancient Greece sport was always an activity with heavy political and religious overtones (as other essays in this volume make clear) and it was only fitting that it should often take place in multipurpose civic and religious spaces like the *agora* or a sanctuary.

At the same time, the marginality and indeterminacy of certain types of athletic spaces, like the major *gymnasia* in Athens, may have been merited also precisely because they were at the apex of so many problematic social and political issues for Athenian society. Sport was, after all, often a difficult discourse. In Lucian's *Anacharsis*, set in sixth-century Athens, Solon is seen justifying the Athenians' regard for sport to the Scythian Anacharsis. The justification is based on sport bringing both social and personal good to the city and its people (Scanlon 2002: 20). Yet a fragment of a fifth-century satyr play by Euripides, quoted in Athenaeus (10.413c), outlines the opposite view: "of the thousands of evils which exist in Greece there is no greater evil than the race of athletes." (On ancient Greek critics of Greek sport, see Chapter 21.)

Sport could take place anywhere, but of course it is also easily argued that elaborate structures augmented the experience by adding a monumentality and importance to the events, which reflected well on the organizer (as well as helping manage, and cater for, large crowds). No doubt the development of the wide variety of different facilities associated with managing, hosting, and preparing for athletic competitions and festivals should be understood in this way. Aristophanes (*Wealth* 1161–3) points out that there was a perceived association between civic wealth and the holding of musical and athletic contests. But it should equally be argued that emphasis on spatial and architectural indeterminacy continued through the Archaic and Classical periods because such indeterminacy was extremely useful for the different communities and sanctuaries of ancient Greece in a number of different ways.

First, the variety of place and form for athletic facilities allowed each community or sanctuary to make its facilities and festivals an expression of its own identity. There was no need to conform to a strict checklist, and communities and sanctuaries could make their places of athletic competition in their own particular image. As a result both similarities and differences between different communities and sanctuaries could be more easily recognized. The variability in structure and space could be used, for example, to emphasize differences in competitive specialism. Olympia's lack of a theater made clear the organizers' disinterest in musical and theatrical competition, as opposed to Isthmia's state-of-the-art theater built after the middle of the fourth century.

Second, such indeterminacy also meant that communities could use flexibility in space and structure to assert long-standing claims to territory, or, conversely, to insert themselves into, and demonstrate their control over, a larger festival. At Olympia, for example, the *bouleuterion* was used for Elis's civic business as well as the base from which the *Hellanodikai* administered the festival, adjudicated the games, and settled disputes (see Pausanias 6.3.7 as well as Chapters 8 and 17). In the same vein, the *prytaneion* at Olympia was both Elis's civic hearth and the place for feasting the athletic winners. The location of these structures, at Olympia rather than in the city of Elis itself (located some 50 kilometers to the north) was driven at least in part by Elis's difficulty in establishing its control over Olympia and a concomitant desire to publicize and reinforce its claims to do so.⁵ (See Chapter 8 for further discussion.)

Third, particular kinds of athletic structures, and the flexibility in their shape and space, also worked at the level of expressing Greek identity. Golden (1998: 176) has remarked that sport often problematized the boundaries between Greeks and foreigners, as well as between Greeks, because it redefined individuals not by their origin but as winners and losers. Yet by the second half of the Classical period and into the Early Hellenistic period, the role of athletic facilities as part of a discourse of cultural traditions, and particularly in the discourse of "being Greek," seems to have grown particularly strong. Starting with the conquests of Alexander the Great and the subsequent expansion of Greek settlement into much of the Near East, the tendency to view structures and spaces associated with athletic competition, particularly the *gymnasion*, as a key marker of Greekness became quite powerful and went hand in hand with them developing an ever more recognizable shape and architectural form (for further discussion, see Chapter 23).

Fourth, indeterminacy and multiplicity allowed for a wide range of spatial usage which, though often not at all directly related to sport,

was often motivated by the fact that athletic competitions attracted so many visitors to those places. This usage could be by both people and things. It is well known, for example, that at festivals like those at Delphi and Olympia, in among the crowds of athletic competitors and spectators were also diplomats, poets, artists, writers, philosophers, rhetoric teachers, and historians who used spaces and structures as places to ply their respective trades (see Kokolakis 1992 and in the present volume, Chapter 17).

We also know that many sanctuaries that hosted large athletic festivals were full of objects dedicated by communities, as well as by individual spectators and competitors. These objects were of course primarily dedications to the gods. For example, official inventories from Delos show that the *gymnasia* there were chock full of sculptures and votive offerings, all of which were either brought to the island or made on it for sale (*Inscriptions de Délos* 1417A1.118–54; for a translation see Miller 2004b: no. 180). Such dedications were motivated in part by the fact that large festivals brought large crowds, and thus the opportunity to broadcast a particular message to a wide public. At Olympia, there is evidence for large-scale workshops not just by the *Altis* (e.g., Pheidias's workshop), but all around the exterior of the complex. These workshops provided all sorts of objects for dedication, commemoration, or simple use during the games, many of which remained in the sanctuary after the games were over (Andrews 1994; Morgan 1990: 36–8). Different cities and individuals also brought their own objects with them. As a result, Olympia was bristling with rich statue dedications commemorating victory in war or athletics, alongside *tropaia* (military trophies hanging from posts on the stadium embankments), mixed in with inscribed treaties between cities, statues of Zeus offered by cheating athletes, and treasuries dedicated by communities from around the Greek world (Raschke 1988b; Scott 2010: 146–217; Weiler 1997).

Olympia was not the only sanctuary with athletic competitions to be full of dedications. The sanctuary at Delphi was similarly well supplied, and the communities and individuals responsible for those dedications took advantage of the fact that people came from all over the Greek world both to consult the oracle and to attend the Pythian Games in order to broadcast their own messages of superiority and civic identity. Yet because of the different spatial dynamics at Delphi, those dedications tended to be not *tropaia*, but purpose built monuments in stone and bronze. Moreover, because the stadium at Delphi was not constructed until the fifth century (the earlier stadium had been on the plain below the sanctuary nearer the sea) and because it was even then located up the hill from the main sanctuary, the Delphi stadium was, unlike the stadium at Olympia, never a main

location for such dedications. Rather, the terrace around the Temple of Apollo and the main route through the hillside sanctuary up to the temple were the sites for dedications. In addition, the number of athletic-related statue dedications was significantly less than at Olympia (the Delphi charioteer being the most famous), with many more dedications being unrelated to the athletic competitions, and more frequently related to consultations of the oracle and victory in war (Scott 2010: 41–145).

6 Conclusion

This essay has argued for the need to embrace a much wider definition of athletic facilities in order to encapsulate those necessary not just for competition, but also for athletic preparation and the hosting of athletic festivals orchestrated both by organizers and by private enterprise. Only such a wide-ranging definition can properly encompass the central social, political, religious, and civic roles of sport and the related facilities.

This essay has also sought to underline a crucial common factor in all these spaces and structures during the Archaic and Classical periods: their indeterminacy. It has argued that such indeterminacy was motivated both by the fact that sporting activity needed little in the way of specific architecture to take place and that sport's connection with religious and political activity in Greek society made such multipurpose spaces such as marketplaces and sanctuaries ideal for athletic competition. Furthermore, while architectural elaboration could of course bring benefits in terms of denoting the wealth and importance of the hosting city or sanctuary, this essay has argued that spatial and architectural indeterminacy continued to be perceived as useful during the Archaic and Classical periods. It allowed communities and sanctuaries to mold their athletic competitions and facilities in their own image and thus highlight the similarities and differences between them (as well as increasingly between Greeks and non-Greeks) and make claims about their position in the wider landscape. Such spatial and architectural indeterminacy also provided opportunities for different *poleis* (city-states) to utilize athletic spaces and facilities to broadcast messages often wholly unrelated to the athletic competitions themselves. As such, it was the spatial and architectural indeterminacy of athletic facilities that not only reflected, but also helped to make possible, such a central place for athletics in the Greek world during the Archaic and Classical periods.

ABBREVIATIONS

SIG³ = *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd edition

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Literary sources indicate that the hippodrome at Olympia was ultimately furnished with elaborate starting gates and a variety of decorative elements (Sinn 2000: 74–5; cf. Ebert 1989), but excavations of this hippodrome have only just begun.
- 3 There is no up-to-date, comprehensive work on the architectural history of *gymnasia* and *palaistrai*. Delorme’s *Gymnasion* (1960) remains fundamental but is being rendered increasingly obsolete by new excavations and scholarship, and the same is true of Glass’s 1967 dissertation “*Palaistra* and *Gymnasia* in Greek Architecture.” More current but less comprehensive scholarship includes (but is by no means limited to) Glass 1988; Moretti 1996; Vanhove 1992a; Wacker 1996; and Winter 2006: 115–34. The best known *gymnasia* are those of Athens, which are discussed in detail in Kyle 1987: 64–92. Plato’s *Euthydemus* (272e, 273a–b) offers a good sense of the appearance of Athens’s Lyceum *gymnasion*, and his *Lysis* (203a–7a) describes a privately owned *palaistra*.
- 4 On the collection of oil for prizes at the Panathenaic Games, see Shear 2003.
- 5 On the history of Elis’s attempts to exert control over Olympia, see Christesen 2007a: 51–7; Nielsen 2007: 29–54; and Roy 2004.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For straightforward engagements with the relevant primary sources, see Sweet 1987 and Miller 2004b. Surveys of the athletic facilities at the sites of major Greek athletic festivals can be found in Miller 2004a and Valavanis 2004. For further reading on the development of particular athletic facilities at different sites, see Kyle 1987 (on Athens); Bruneau and Ducat 2005 (on Delos); Bommelaer 1991 (on Delphi); Miller 2004c (on Nemea); Sinn 2000 (on Olympia). On Olympia see also Crowther 2004: 1–134; Kyrieleis 2003; and Mallwitz 1988 as well as the articles collected in Raschke 1988a; Coulson and Kyrieleis 1992; and Kyrieleis 2002.

On *gymnasia* and *palaistrai*, see Delorme 1960; Fisher 1998; Glass 1988; Pritchard 2003 and 2009; and Winter 2006: 115–34.

For wider discussions of ancient sport and its connections with social status and religion, see Golden 1998 and 2008; Scanlon 2002; and Chapter 20 in this volume. On the associations between athletic facilities and individual and civic power, see Kyle 2007: 170–4. For useful edited volumes on a number of issues relating to athletic facilities and their wider social context, see Cartledge, Millett, and von Reden 1998 and Philips and Pritchard 2003.

CHAPTER 20

The Role of Religion in Greek Sport

Sarah C. Murray

1 Introduction

A notable aspect of the athletic contests held at the major Panhellenic sanctuaries of the ancient Greeks (Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea) was that the prize for victors was a simple wreath rather than a valuable material reward. In Lucian's dialogue *Anacharsis* Solon's Scythian interlocutor suggests that the Greeks are of questionable sanity insofar as they invest large amounts of time and effort in training for athletic contests for which the only reward is a heap of weeds. "As if it were not possible for anyone who wants them to get plenty of apples without any trouble, or to wear a wreath of parsley or of pine without having his face bedaubed with mud or letting himself get kicked in the belly by his opponent!" scoffs Anacharsis (9.2, trans. A. Harmon). Solon, ever full of serene wisdom, explains that Greek athletes compete not for the material prizes at stake, but for the honor of the victory itself, since "the one among them who succeeds in winning is counted equal to the gods" (10.3).

To the modern reader, accustomed to a largely secular world of athletes and athletics, the notion that a great athlete should be considered not only like but in fact equal to the gods is a striking one. However, in ancient Greece, organized, formal athletic competitions took place most commonly as components of religious festivals at either Panhellenic or local sanctuaries. Athletes were considered to succeed or fail at least partly because of the favor or disfavor of the presiding deities. And, as Lucian's Solon suggests, successful athletes were even occasionally elevated to something above human status and worshipped as divine figures. Pericles praised the Athenians for the frequency of their "games and sacrifices" (Thucydides 2.38.1), and it

seems to be generally true that ancient Greek sport and religion went together as naturally as modern sport and corporate sponsorships.

Although the association between sport and religion in ancient Greece is clear enough, the manner in which this link came about and was made manifest remains something of a puzzle. In this essay I consider the evidence for the interaction of religion and sport from three perspectives. First, I discuss how sport became closely tied to religious festivals. Then I move on to address elements of religiosity and ritual in sport as practiced at religious festivals. Finally, I consider the religious status of victorious athletes.

2 Religion and the Origins of Greek Sport

The majority of Greek athletic competitions took place in the context of religious festivals, and the religious tone of the major games cannot be denied. Sacrifices punctuated the schedule of events, sacred processions and truces conducted participants and officials to sanctuaries at which competitions were held, and athletes swore by and prayed to divine patrons before taking their place on the starting line. But was there an entrenched and meaningful link between athletic competitions and the sanctuaries and festivals in which they took place, or was their association instead based on coincidence, convenience, or historical accident? To clarify the nature of the relationship between athletic competitions and the religious festivals at which they took place, it is necessary to delve at least briefly into the fraught topic of the origins of formally organized athletic competitions in ancient Greece.

The rather sparse evidence for sport in the Aegean Bronze Age (c.3000–c. 1100 BCE)¹ suggests that the Minoans and Mycenaeans enjoyed watching acrobatic spectacles (including bull jumping) and combat sports such as boxing in public, if not necessarily ritual, contexts during the second millennium (see Chapter 2 in this volume). Some contemporary Hittite texts likewise point to the existence of physical contests during ceremonies that served to aggrandize their kings or to rank royal entourages (Bryce 2002: 187–95; Puhvel 1988).

Both literary (primarily the Homeric poems) and archaeological (remains from Olympia and inscribed bronze cauldrons) evidence dating to the eighth century indicate that by that point in time Greeks were holding formally organized athletic contests with some regularity. That evidence reveals a well-established tradition of

holding athletic contests as part of funerary rites and suggests that athletic contests were also held at some local religious festivals (see Chapter 3). The date at which the Olympics were first held remains a subject of dispute, but it is probable that they were founded before the end of the eighth century (Christesen 2007: 18–21, 146–57).

There is, however, no compelling reason to draw a connection between Bronze Age sport and the formally organized athletic contests evident starting in the eighth century. We have no indication that formally organized athletic contests were held during the so-called Dark Age (c.1100–900) that separated later Greeks from the Bronze Age. Moreover, the Dark Age was marked by numerous and important discontinuities, and the eighth century was a period of great social change across a variety of indicators encompassing most areas of Greek life. Some caution is necessary because there are no extant literary texts from this period, and the archaeological record is less rich than one might hope. Nonetheless, the sources at our disposal, along with what we know about the period between 1100 and 700 in more general terms, both suggest that formally organized athletic contests were an independent development that owed little to Bronze Age practices. The link between formally organized athletic contests and religious festivals cannot, therefore, be understood as an inheritance from the Bronze Age.

Greek historical traditions shed little light on the subject, as Classical literature presents a variegated and self-contradictory tapestry of mythology and legend about the connection between athletic contests and religious festivals. The foundation of the Olympics, for example, was variously ascribed to Zeus (either because he wrestled Kronos at Olympia or as celebration for his victory over Kronos to see who would be king of the gods), Herakles of Thebes (as celebration for his conquest of Elis), Idaian Herakles (as a contest for his brothers), Pelops (as celebration of his victory in a chariot race over King Oinomaos of Pisa or in honor of Oinomaos or Pisos), or Pisos (the eponymous hero of the Pisatans, who inhabited the region around Olympia). Like many Greek etiologies, these stories are difficult to reconcile with each other or with reality, and probably represent later inventions meant to legitimize contemporary social and political claims. Writing about Olympia in the first century, Strabo advised his readers that “one should disregard the ancient stories both of the founding of the sanctuary and of the establishment of the games . . . for such stories are told in many ways, and no faith at all is to be put in them” (*Geography* 8.3.30, trans. H. Jones).²

Scholars have put forward a variety of explanations for the appearance of games at Greek religious festivals. One possibility is that athletic competitions in Greek sanctuaries originated as a form of

reiterative funeral games for local heroes. From an anthropological point of view, athletic competition at funerals can fulfill a variety of functions within society, for example, reemphasizing the distinction between the living and the dead, appeasing the restless spirits of departed individuals by entertaining them with activities that they would enjoy, and reintegrating and reestablishing a cohesive living community after the traumatic loss of an important member. Funeral games in ancient Greece are attested in Homer's *Iliad*, in which Achilles gathers the Greek army to honor his fallen comrade Patroklos with a series of competitions pitting the strongest runners, throwers, boxers, and charioteers against one another for prizes (*Iliad* 23.257–897). Games associated with the death of great men, especially war heroes, continued in later times (for instance, the Spartan statesman Brasidas was so honored at his death in 422, see Roller 1981 for further examples), and it is perhaps not coincidental that at least three of the four major Panhellenic games were located at sanctuaries associated with a funeral cult (Pelops at Olympia, Melikertes at Isthmia, Opheltes at Nemea).³ On the other hand, the foundational stories associated with these games are in large part unsubstantiated by the archaeological evidence – for instance, the Pelopeion at Olympia was established much later than the cult of Zeus (Kyrieleis 2006; Rambach 2002) – so these stories may have been projected backward by historical Greeks to explain or legitimize the games instead of actually having played a role in their establishment. It is, at any rate, unclear to what degree funeral games incorporated actual religious activity – processions, oaths, and so on – so seeking the genealogy of historic Greek festival athletics in funeral contests remains problematic.⁴

A second possibility is that at least some religious festivals had their roots in initiation rites that included a footrace and that these religious festivals, as a result, had an athletic component from the outset. Rites of passage were widespread in ancient Greece, and frequently required that participants undergo a physical trial of some kind. Scholars who trace the origins of the Olympics to initiation rites have pointed to the existence at Olympia of an athletic festival for unmarried girls, the Heraia, which was clearly initiatory in nature. They have also claimed to find in the various practices attached to the Olympics a cycle of separation, liminality, and reintegration that is standard in initiation rites all over the globe. One might also add that athletic contests associated with initiation rites in Greece always consisted of footraces, and the original program of the Olympics was thought to have consisted of a single footrace, the *stadion*. Although the evidence linking the Olympics to initiation rites is collectively impressive, it is less convincing than it might seem at first glance.

Very little is known about when and how the Heraia came into being, no single feature of the Olympics can be definitively identified as being derived from an initiation rite, and the nature of the program of events at early iterations of the Olympics is impossible to reconstruct with any certainty. Here again we have a seemingly plausible but ultimately unprovable and probably flawed hypothesis.⁵

A third possibility, primarily associated with the work of David Sansone (1988), is that ritual and sport are inherently connected because all athletic competitions are a stylized remnant of ceremonial prehunt rituals conducted by Paleolithic men. Sansone saw all sport (ancient and modern) as a sacrifice of human energy meant to imitate the exertion needed by early man to hunt and kill wild prey. From this perspective, the sacrifices and feasts at the center of all Greek festivals mimicked the outcome of a successful hunt, while athletic competitions reproduced the hunt itself, suggesting that the two were in fact intimately joined and closely complementary. Sansone sought to tie various characteristics of sport as practiced at Greek religious sanctuaries to early hunting ritual. For instance, crown wreaths given as prizes at the Panhellenic games are portrayed as vestigial elements of foliate camouflage, and the exclusion of women from the games as related to the need for early hunters to undergo a period of sexual abstinence before they embarked upon their mission. There are numerous difficulties with Sansone's arguments, not least the enormous temporal gap between Paleolithic hunting and eighth-century athletic festivals (for further discussion, see Kyle 1988).

A fourth possibility is that athletic contests were intended to entertain and honor the anthropomorphic gods that made up the Greek pantheon and that religious festivals thus naturally included sport. This explanation accords well with the athletic contests held in honor of Apollo on the island of Delos as they are described in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, composed around 650: "Yet in Delos do you most delight in your heart; for there the long robed Ionians gather in your honor with their children and shy wives: mindful, they delight you with boxing and dancing and song, so often as they hold their gathering" (146–50, trans. H. Evelyn-White). Greek myths depict jealous and agonistic gods who take part in the same kinds of athletic contests held at actual festival games (see, for example, Pausanias 5.7.10). In addition, Greeks believed that gods enjoyed the same kinds of pleasures, such as wine, dancing, song, and even beauty contests, as their terrestrial counterparts. Performances of great aesthetic virtuosity were considered suitable gifts for the immortals, and it is likely that this applied also to elevated athletic performances. While the argument that festival games were literally meant to be a kind of gift to the gods is a compelling one that dovetails well with our

knowledge of Greek religion overall, it holds little explanatory power, since it does not fix any rationale for the timing of the advent of religious games or the peculiarities that characterized the events therein.

It is not entirely impossible that the correspondence of games and gods was a matter of pure happenstance. E. Norman Gardiner, an early historian of the ancient Olympics, argued that the natural agonism of the Greeks led to the more or less spontaneous foundation of athletic competitions, and that festivals – as gathering places for large groups of Greeks from a variety of city-states – simply provided a convenient context in which already popular games could occur. Gardiner stated that “there is no ground for attributing any religious significance to the games themselves . . . the fact is that Greek athletic sports, though closely associated with religion, are in their origin independent and secular” (1925: 67). Likewise, Mark Golden has concluded that one should not “make too much” of the connection between religion and sport, since almost every aspect of Greek society was to some extent pervaded by “cult activity and invocations of the gods” (1998: 23).

Given the incomplete nature of the evidence, the origins of the connection between athletic contests and religious festivals are likely to remain shrouded in mystery. Perhaps the question of when or how sport came to be associated with religious festivals may have proven so difficult to answer because it is entirely wrongheaded to begin with. Colin Renfrew argues that “it is not appropriate to assume that the Greek religion, as we see it fully fledged in the fifth century BC, was already in existence in the earlier days of the eighth or seventh centuries” (Renfrew 1988: 20). From this perspective, it is possible to envision athletic competitions playing an active role in the formation and crystallization of Greek religion. As Renfrew argues, “it may be true that the early Greek religion developed through the influence of the great Panhellenic sanctuaries in which competitions played a major role” (1988: 23). Thus, attempting to disentangle the way in which games and festivals came to be associated becomes an exercise in teleology, with neither religion nor sport having any ordered existence separate from one another.

3 Religiosity and Ritual in Festival Games

However athletic competitions came to be associated with religious

festivals, by the Archaic period (700–480) the games and the sacred rites of the festivals where they took place were inextricably linked. Greek religion was based more on practice than on belief, and by the sixth century the enactment of athletic competitions was an important and integral manifestation of worship. At the same time, certain aspects of the games remained distinct and separate from the parallel cult activities, and so it is still possible to question the strength of the link between the athletic and ritual aspects of the festivals.

While it is true that games often took place at religious sanctuaries, it is equally true that athletic facilities at those sites were, by the Classical period (480–323) at the latest, typically topographically separated from spaces used primarily for religious purposes. At Olympia, the sacred core of the site (the *Altis*) contains both the oldest and the most extravagant architecture (see [Map 8.2](#)). The ash altar dedicated to Zeus Olympios, the symbolic and actual center of worship at the site, was situated in the *Altis*. That altar, which was almost certainly in use from the beginning of the worship of Zeus at Olympia around 1000, was gradually surrounded by an array of structures, many of which served religious purposes. Those structures included temples to Zeus and to Hera, a shrine to the hero Pelops, and treasuries holding dedications to the gods.

While athletic events were probably originally held in the *Altis* itself, by the middle of the sixth century a formal stadium had been laid out on the eastern edge of the *Altis*, and later athletic facilities, such as the *gymnasion*, were also located outside the core area of the sanctuary. A similar disposition of spaces emerged over the course of time at Delphi, Nemea, and Isthmia, creating a spatial separation of the sacred areas of festival sites and the areas where athletic events took place. That separation can be seen as either incidental, a result of the fact that games grew up around preestablished cult places, or the result of a desire to dichotomize spaces devoted to gods and to games. It may be worth noting, however, that while in strictly spatial terms religious and athletic facilities were distinct, other links between the two existed. For instance, it has been shown that the length of the foot used to measure out the stadium at Olympia was the same as that used to measure the Temple of Zeus.⁶

Like the architectural geography of the sanctuaries, the division of labor and schedules of events at festival games suggests a close but always technically separate relationship between sport and religion. Religious laws that survive from Olympia demonstrate the degree to which those officials who had authority over athletic matters were distinct from the religious personnel of the sanctuary. In terms of Olympic rules, “there is a remarkable separation of the agonistic sphere from the ritual sphere of the sanctuary” (Siewert 1992: 116). It

is clear from the survival of a number of the sacred laws governing Olympia that the majority of the religious officials who worked at the sanctuary were not involved in the administration of the games and that the primary athletic authorities, such as the *Hellaniotai* (on which, see Chapter 17), were more or less secular.

At the same time, the supreme authority over any particular games was the god of the relevant sanctuary. At Olympia one of the first things that competitors did upon entering the sanctuary was to swear by Zeus to uphold the rules of the games (Pausanias 5.24.9). When lots were drawn to determine starting positions, they were drawn from a vessel that was consecrated to Zeus, and each competitor took his turn after reciting a prayer to the god (Lucian *Hermotimos* 40). Fines for infractions by athletes and states at the Olympic Games were paid to the deity, and the proceeds from these infractions went to the creation of the *Zanes*, statues of Zeus that were set up in the sanctuary to remind all comers of the eternal shame endured by cheaters (Pausanias 5.21.2). According to Pausanias, the third of these statues bore an inscription “declar[ing] that the image stands . . . to be a terror to law-breaking athletes” (Pausanias 5.21.4). The degree to which the pious terror of the gods was an effective deterrent may have varied, but the idea that the threat of divine retribution may have dissuaded some potential bribers or cheaters suggests that religion was not completely absent from the thoughts of the competitors.

Thus, the tone of festival games was explicitly religious. But did the athletes themselves think much of the role of religion in the games? To what degree did the experience of the athlete presuppose willing participation in ritual? Procedurally, athletes were indeed enmeshed in a variety of rites throughout their time at the games. Athletes preparing to compete at Olympia swore by Zeus Horkios that they would perpetrate no evil against the games and that they had trained responsibly for the preceding 10 months (Pausanias 5.24.9–10). Victors at the major Panhellenic games received wreaths made from sacred plants and made dedications to the gods after victory (see, for example, Pausanias 5.15.3 and 6.1.1–16.9, respectively). But of course, going through the motions required by the festival officials does not necessarily entail the belief in divine authority over one’s behavior or the possibility that the gods could snatch away or grant victory.

While it is impossible to truly know how much of their performance Greek athletes felt depended upon or was meant to entertain and glorify the gods, plenty of evidence suggests at least a healthy level of superstition on the part of competitors (Mikalson 2007). A number of lead curse tablets discovered in Corinth, at Isthmia, and in Athens show athletes invoking divine aid to inhibit the

performance of their opponents. One example, from the *agora* (marketplace) in Athens, directed against a wrestler named Eutychian, features phrases such as “Let Eutychian be deaf, dumb, mindless, harmless, and not fighting against anyone,” “Bind Eutychian in the unilluminated eternity of oblivion and chill and destroy also the wrestling that he is going to do this coming Friday,” and “If Eutychian does wrestle, [let him] fall and disgrace himself” (Jordan 1985: 214–15). Though it is not possible to be sure that curse tablets such as these were commissioned or written by the intended victims’ athletic rivals (as opposed to enemies they had made for other reasons), the texts at least suggest that some Greeks thought that the gods did have power over athletic events.

Likewise, literary sources indicate that Greeks in general believed that the gods presided over athletic victory. In Homer’s *Iliad*, Athena interferes in the footrace (23.740–97) at Odysseus’s behest. While Odysseus clearly would not have won the race without his own active efforts and skill at running, there is also a passive element of his victory, dependent upon his acquisition of good will from the divine.

A similar concept of this “modality of self-determination” (Crotty 1982: 3) is suggested in *epinikia*, odes written by commissioned poets in honor of the victors at important games (see Chapter 4). A considerable number of these works, many of them composed by the lyric poet Pindar in the early decades of the fifth century, have come down to us and provide a good sense of the way in which the divine role in athletic victory was conceived. A typical victory ode both exalts the efforts of the athlete and acknowledges the role that the god had in enabling the triumph to happen. The general tone is that while the strength and training of the athlete is an essential component for winning at the games, the help of the god matters more. For instance, in *Pythian* 8, Pindar warns that “if someone has gained success without long labor, he seems to many to be a wise man among fools . . . but those things do not rest with men: a god grants them, exalting now one man, but throwing another beneath the hands” (73–6, trans. W. Race). The final phrase is a metaphor taken from wrestling, and helps make the point that success both in sport and in life more generally is dependent on divine assistance.

4 The Religious Status of Victorious Athletes

The evidence suggests, then, that athletes participating in festival

games thought that the gods had a hand in the success or failure of their efforts. The other side of this coin was that part of the reward for victory or for a particularly distinguished record of athletic achievement may have been a chance at some measure of immortality. As Solon suggests in his conversation with Anacharsis, there were many rewards for Olympic victors in addition to the sacred olive crown. The conquering hero was often granted *sitesis*, free dining at the town hall, for the rest of his life (Currie 2005: 142–3). Statues were set up, either in a suitable Panhellenic sanctuary or in his hometown, in his honor. Pliny notes that Greeks did not customarily erect statues of men “unless they had earned eternal preservation for some illustrious reason, especially victory in the sacred games, in particular Olympia” (*Natural History* 34.16, trans. B. Currie). These statues seem to have had a ritual function beyond the strictly secular utility of commemorating a victory, and may have been intended to facilitate the perpetual reenactment of the moment at which the winning athlete received the sacred crown (Kurke 1993: 144).

In addition, the Greeks believed that winning at one of the major Panhellenic athletic festivals such as Olympia endowed an athlete with a semimagical invincibility known as *kudos*, which set him apart as favored by the gods and worthy of exaltation by his fellow men (Kurke 1993; though cf. the skeptical comments in Kyriakou 2007). The idea that athletic victory could earn a man a special place within the mortal–divine spectrum may be the most overtly religious, even mystical, aspect of the world of Greek sport and spectacle. The Spartans positioned crown game victors near the king at the front of the army when marching out for battle (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 22.4), evidently because they were believed to possess a special aura.

A certain number of Greek athletes literally became objects of worship. There is evidence that at least a dozen athletes were heroized, which meant that they were believed to have attained a status somewhere between human and divine and were worshipped in local cults (Christesen 2010; Currie 2005; Lunt 2009). Most of these cults seem to have been founded in the fifth century, but many endured for centuries. For example, Theagenes of Thasos, who had an improbably successful athletic career in the first half of the fifth century, became after his death an object of cult both in his hometown and elsewhere and was believed to have notable healing powers. Pausanias, writing in the second century CE, states that the cult was active in his own time (6.11.2–9), and remains of an altar to Theagenes, complete with an inscription dating to c.100 CE, have been found in Thasos (Miller 2004: 163–4).

5 Conclusion

On balance, it is clear that there is indeed something to the connection between sport and religion in ancient Greece. But is it, as Golden (1998: 23) suggests, “a mistake to make too much of it”? Greeks explained the origin of their athletic contests by appealing to the gods and heroes that they worshipped and to whom they gave credit for many of the successes and failures of their lives. Athletic competitions were thoroughly saturated with religious activities such as sacrifices, oaths, and prayers. Songs in praise of athletes frequently acknowledged the role that the gods played in their victories and defeats, and great achievements in the games were thought to endow men with special powers of invincibility. At the same time, ancient Greece was a place in which the gods and religion seemed to permeate most parts of everyday life, and so the commingling of sport and worship in this environment does not necessarily imply that religious concerns outweighed secular, political, and social interests in ancient sport. Given the difficulty that previous scholars have encountered in their attempts at sorting out the religious from the secular in ancient Greek sport, it seems likely that the best way to move forward on this topic will involve a move toward seeking to explicate and shed light on the thick entanglement of religion and sport rather than to separate out the one from the other.

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 On ancient explanations for the foundation of the Olympics, see Golden 1998: 10–23.
- 3 The situation at Delphi is complicated because the relevant myths do feature a death, but of a snake rather than of a human being.
- 4 The single most important piece of scholarship that traces the origins of Greek athletic contests to funerary rites is Meuli 1975 (1941): 881–906, though see also Drees 1962 and Herrmann 1962. Variants on this basic line of thought trace the Olympics to cults for the dead and hero worship. The voluminous scholarship on the origins of the Olympics is surveyed in Ulf and Weiler 1980. Much has been written about the Olympics since Ulf and Weiler’s survey (see, for instance, the interesting arguments presented in Valavanis 2006 and Instone 2007), but the only fundamentally new theory put forward is that of Sansone, which is reviewed below.
- 5 Arguments in favor of tracing the origin of the Olympics to

initiation rites can be found in Jeanmaire 1939: 413–8; Brelich 1969: 449–56; and Burkert 1983 (1972): 93–103. On initiation rites in ancient Greece, see Graf 1996 and the bibliography cited therein. On cycles of separation, liminality, and reintegration in initiation rites, see van Gennep 1960 (1906). On the Heraia, see Kyle's essay on female sport, Chapter 16 in this volume. On the program of the events at the early Olympics, see Christesen 2007: 476–8.

6 On the early history of the sanctuary at Olympia, see Eder 2001 and Kyrieleis 2006. On the development of the architecture at the site, see Mallwitz 1988 and Miller 2004: 87–95. On the stadium at Olympia, and the use of the temple foot in the stadium, see Romano 1993: 9–24. On the architectural history of the other Panhellenic game sites, see Miller 2004: 95–112 and the bibliography cited therein.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Useful introductions to the topic of religion and Greek sport can be found in works by Golden (1998: 10–23) and Scanlon (2002: 25–39).

The origins of athletic and religious festivals are discussed at length by Sansone 1988 and in Evjen's more evenhanded essay (Evjen 1992). On possible Near Eastern influences on Aegean Bronze Age sport, see Decker 2004. Kyle (2007: 23–53) offers an excellent summary of the evidence for possible Bronze Age predecessors of Greek athletic festivals. Morgan's (1990) extensive account of the early genesis of the sites where the most important athletic festivals took place has much to offer anyone interested in how religion and sport became associated.

For a good overview of how religious ceremonies were integrated into the day-to-day activities of athletic festivals, see Adshead 1986: 53–7. Mallwitz 1988 summarizes the evidence for the religious and secular geography at Olympia, while Siewert 1992 goes into some detail on the division of labor among religious and secular officials. Ulf and Weiler 1980 survey scholarship on the origins of the Olympics.

A compelling and expansive examination of the heroization of athletes can be found in Currie 2005, while Mikalson 2007 compiles a significant amount of literary evidence pertaining to the role that gods played in athletic competitions. Two works by Kurke (1991, 1993) offer an excellent introduction to the concept and use of *kudos* in Greek sport and society.

CHAPTER 21

Ancient Critics of Greek Sport

Zinon Papakonstantinou

1 Introduction

Competitive sport can incite passions, dissent, criticism, even conflict. The link between sport and various forms of criticism and dissent can be documented in most societies that have practiced sport, including the ancient Greeks. Physical education regimes, initiatory rituals that incorporated athletic elements, and competitive sport were popular and deeply embedded features of the daily life of the ancient Greeks. Some critics, however, were far from content with this state of affairs.

This essay provides an overview of the major discourses of dissent concerning Greek sport in Greco-Roman antiquity in a way that is conscious, whenever possible, of historical context, regional and diachronic variations, and authorial particularities. Two questions will inform much of the discussion that follows: why is the author or historical agent in question attacking sport and to what extent are his grievances shared by his contemporaries? Moreover, we will attempt to identify patterns, problems, and social implications behind extant instances of sport criticism, as well as survey some responses to sport detractors. Because of the inevitable complexity of personal and communal attitudes to sport, the fragmentary nature of many sources, and our limited understanding of various aspects of Greek literature and history, the answers to these questions are by necessity often incomplete, circumspect, and tentative. Nevertheless, an analysis of prominent instances of sport criticism can illuminate ideological and social facets of Greek sport.

2 *Arete* and Rewards: Critics of Sport in Archaic Greece

Greeks practiced sport from at least the Bronze Age (c.3000–c.1100 BCE),¹ but the evidence for Greek sport becomes significantly more extensive starting in the eighth century. The Homeric poems provide two interesting vignettes that feature organized athletic contests (the funeral games of Patroklos, *Iliad* 23.257–897 and the games in Phaiakia, *Odyssey* 8.97–255) as well as numerous passing references to sport, both competitive and casual. Sport is portrayed in the Homeric epics primarily as a worthy pastime, an extension of the network of social relations and obligations of the aristocracy as well as a domain of social distinction, on a par with military valor and political leadership skills, for the warrior ruling elite. The Homeric aristocratic ideology of sport and physical skills is best articulated in the adage uttered by Laodamas in the context of an invitation to Odysseus to participate in the games at Phaiakia: “So long as a man lives, he has no greater glory [*kleos*] than what he wins with the strength of his hands and the speed of his feet” (*Odyssey* 8.145–8, trans. D. Young). Achievement in sport, similarly to achievement on the battlefield, singles out the valorous aristocrat from the commoner and corroborates the former’s position of social ascendancy. Correlatively, a trader (i.e., not an aristocrat) is not expected to be a competent athlete (*Odyssey* 8.159–64). (For detailed discussion of sport in the Homeric poems, see Chapter 3 in this volume.)

While the Homeric epics have a Panhellenic outlook, in the sense that they tend to brush over local peculiarities in favor of the depiction of a culture shared by elites all over the Greek world, the emergence in the Archaic period (700–480) of poets whose work responds to more local contexts reveals a complex picture concerning attitudes to sport. In a poem from the late seventh century composed for a Spartan audience, Tyrtaeus asserts that martial valor is superior to athletic ability, physical beauty, wealth, pedigree, and eloquence. Prowess on the battlefield “is excellence [*arete*], it is the best and fairest [*ariston kalliston te*] prize that a man can attain” (Fragment 12 West, ll. 13–14). In Tyrtaeus’s classification of civic values, military valor in the service of the community takes pride of place, whereas athletic ability and other personal attributes that elevate the status of the individual, although not necessarily incompatible with fighting skills, come a distant second (Bernardini 1980: 84–7; Meier 1998: 272–90; Visa-Ondarçuhu 1999: 213–28; Hodkinson 1999: 149).

A few decades after Tyrtaeus, the reformer Solon was given extraordinary powers to deal with an acute social and economic crisis

afflicting Athens. Solon's archonship and legislation are traditionally dated to 594. Reports in late sources that attribute to the lawgiver a disparaging attitude toward athletes and athletics are usually discounted as late inventions influenced by philosophical ideas (Bernardini 1980: 87–8; Kyle 1984: 95; cf. Marcovich 1978: 25). Nonetheless, a law attributed to Solon (Plutarch *Solon* 23.3; Diogenes Laertius 1.55–6) specifying monetary rewards to be given by Athens to Olympic and Isthmian victors is usually accepted as genuine (Bernardini 1980: 87; Kyle 1984; Pleket 2001: 171; Mann 2001: 68–81). It is arguable that Solon's law curtailed and standardized existing state rewards to athletic victors, in which case that law might reflect Athenian popular discontent with aristocratic athletes and their rich rewards, sentiments that Solon perhaps shared.

The theme of athletic rewards also surfaces in the work of Xenophanes, a poet active in the sixth century, who scathingly berates athletic achievements (Fragment 2 West; see Miller 2004: no. 229 for a translation). He complains that Olympic victors are glorified by their contemporaries and receive numerous prerogatives and rewards (front-row seats at public festivals, meals at public expense, valuable gifts). All that attention and outlay for athletes, Xenophanes argues, is misplaced. Athletes do not deserve the honors they receive because their physical strength and athletic skills make their communities neither well governed nor prosperous. On the contrary, owing to his *sophie* (a semantically nuanced term combining elements of intellectual wisdom and practical expertise, see Harris 2009: 158–63), which is superior to the physical strength of men or horses, the poet himself is more worthy of the privileges and rewards that athletic victors receive. Like Tyrtaeus, Xenophanes constructs a hierarchy of civic values in which athletic skill is subordinate to other qualities (in this case *sophie*). This line of thought does not rule out the right of the athletic victor to be honored and rewarded (Giannini 1982: 60); it just prescribes that such honors should not exceed the accolades and emolument bestowed to men with *sophie*. Moreover, the crux of the criticism in this fragment is not primarily the athletes themselves, but rather their communities and fellow citizens who elevate the value of athletic achievements to unwarranted levels and reward athletic victors in a manner that is disproportionate to their real contribution (Young 1984: 165; Kyle 1987: 127, n. 17). It is not clear if in the poem in question Xenophanes, an itinerant scholar, had a particular community in mind or whether he considered what he perceived as excessive adulation and remuneration of athletic victors a Panhellenic phenomenon. Yet it is worth noting that in addition to Xenophanes Fragment 2 and the law of Solon discussed above, there are indications that other Greek communities lavishly rewarded actual or

potential athletic victors (see, for example, Ebert 1972: 251–5 on Sybaris).

To better understand the culture of athletic adulation that Xenophanes reviles one needs to read his near-contemporary Pindar, another poet, who is the main exponent of the ideology of elite athletic glorification allegedly in the service of community interests (Kurke 1991). For Pindar, mental, moral, and physical excellence are ranked equally on the same high plane (Young 2005: 26–7). Moreover, these qualities are often represented as inherited. In practice, Pindar's wealthy clients exploited this image for their own personal advantage and often for political purposes. Presumably Xenophanes disapproved, given his assertion that advanced athletic skills do not help produce well-ordered communities. In this sense, in addition to being critical of the community for heaping excessive honors on athletes, Xenophanes should also be read in the context of a wider contemporary debate, conducted primarily within the ranks of the elites, on the meaning and value of traditional aristocratic concepts and practices, as well as on the position of the social elites vis-à-vis the lower social orders and the changing political landscape of the sixth century (Morris 2000: 171–85).

The relatively limited amount of extant, relevant evidence means that it is difficult to know if Xenophanes was something of an eccentric or was giving voice to widely shared sentiments. If Solon in fact curtailed rewards for Olympic and Isthmian victors, one might well conclude that there was support in some quarters of the citizenry of Archaic Greek communities for the resentment some intellectuals felt toward the lavish privileges awarded to athletes. But problems remain. Most importantly, the sixth century was a period of rapid, large-scale expansion of athletic activity in the Greek world (Christesen 2007). Competitive athletics became firmly established, marked by the emergence of a cycle of Panhellenic athletic contests as well as the foundation of numerous local games (see Chapter 1). At the same time, elements of the so-called gymnasium culture also came into being (Mann 1998). These developments undoubtedly presuppose a widespread popularity and approval of sport beyond the social elites who largely dominated the victor lists in the major games (Pleket 1975). The apparent increase in the popularity of sport is difficult (though not impossible) to reconcile with the idea that sport was reviled by large segments of the populace of Greek communities.²

Moreover, despite the admonitions of Tyrtaeus, competitive athletics remained a popular activity even within the ranks of Spartan elite in the Archaic period and beyond, as indicated by the Olympic victor lists and other evidence (Hodkinson 1999; Crowther 2004: 99–108, though cf. the cautionary comments in Christesen forthcoming).

In the case of Solon, if one accepts that his law on state rewards for Olympic and Isthmian victors stemmed from popular discontent, that disapproval was probably directed toward aristocrats in general and the flamboyant display of their wealth, a contentious issue in the Archaic period. Disapproval was, therefore, not necessarily toward sport per se or the right of successful athletes to be rewarded. Overall, the evidence suggests that for the Archaic period at least, critics' perceptions and agendas were not widely shared by Greeks at large. The latter thronged to Panhellenic and local athletic festivals and enjoyed the contests as spectators.

3 Sport, Politics, and Conflict

The sixth century was an era of profound change in both sport and politics. Trends toward egalitarianism and wider participation in state institutions emerged (Morris 2000: 155–98). Although these trends did not inexorably lead to some form of democracy in all parts of Greece, we should acknowledge that developments in political ideology and practices must have impacted athletic ideology. For example, some aristocratic victors emphasized the benefits that accrued to their home city through their victories (Kurke 1993). Perhaps paradoxically, some new political trends were facilitated by tyrants, who often appropriated the support of the populace, thus making the people an active agent in the political arena (Hammer 2005). Tyrants are also frequently credited with establishing or enlarging local festivals, most notably Peisistratos, who seems to have had a hand in embellishing the Panathenaic festival in Athens (Kyle 1987: 35–6). Overall, by the middle of the fifth century the expanded and more sophisticated world of interstate and local sport operated in an environment of increasing social and political complexity.

In the Classical period (480–323) and subsequent centuries, extant instances of criticisms of sport multiply and diversify, in part because of the proliferation of our source material. Whenever the available material allows, we can detect complex and multilayered perceptions of sport. Themes evident in the Archaic period, including complaints about athletes' inadequate intellectual and military skills, continue to crop up among later critics. Often these themes are combined with physiological and physiognomic arguments, especially among philosophers and medical writers. Equally significantly, political and class considerations often appear to condition negative assessments of sport.

Although not necessarily typical in the Greek world, Athens is a

good case in point. By the middle of the fifth century Athens had several festivals with programs that included competitive athletics, and more were added over the course of time (Kyle 1987: 32–53; Osborne 2010: 325–40). Moreover, iconographic and literary sources document activities in Athenian *gymnasia* and *palaistrai*. (See Chapter 19 for definitions of these terms.) Such evidence suggests that in ancient Athens, especially after the middle of the sixth century, participating in and watching sport was a widespread, socially accepted activity, and that athletes enjoyed a significant degree of popularity and social visibility.

Like the Archaic critics, most Athenian detractors of sport from the Classical period are selectively critical. For the most part they attack particular athletic practices, habits of athletes, and the ways in which the community perceived and honored athletic victory. Euripides, in his *Autolykos* (Fragment 282 Nauck), echoes Xenophanes in deriding the custom of rewarding athletes lavishly while neglecting wise and moderate men who are useful to their cities (Marcovich 1977; Iannucci 1998; see Miller 2004: no. 230 for a translation). In the same fragment, Euripides also scorns athletes as unfit for the military defense of the city, echoing a complaint we have already encountered in the work of Tyrtaeus. Socrates, in Plato's *Apology* (36d–7a; see Miller 2004: no. 231 for a translation), claims that he is more deserving of free meals at public expense than any equestrian Olympic champion. Isocrates (4.1–2, 15.250; cf. *Epistles* 8.5), repeating the cliché that pits athletes versus intellectuals, castigates cities for rewarding the former at the expense of the latter.

Aristophanes is a special case that needs to be treated with caution (Kyle 1987: 131–4). He often parodies and criticizes athletic practices for satirical effect. Yet the popularity of his plays must lead us to assume that at least some of the views articulated in his jokes were shared by members of his audiences. As was the case with other authors, Aristophanes at times portrays sport as a folly unsuitable for a sensible, mature man (*Clouds* 413–20). Playing on one of his favorite themes, Aristophanes contrasts the good old days with the degenerate present, and often depicts the Athenian youth of his own day as unfit weaklings compared to their robust, trained ancestors (*Frogs* 1088). In the same passage (*Frogs* 1087–98), Aristophanes vividly describes an untrained torch racer in the Panathenaic Games hobbling along while being physically abused by the spectators.

Aristophanes' portrayal of the inept runner is also noteworthy for its focus on the limitations of the athlete's body. The untrained athlete in question is described as “hunched” and “pale.” These references are symptomatic of a wider discourse emerging in the fifth century on athletic training, eating habits, and bodies. Although aspects of this

debate are detectable up through Late Antiquity (e.g., Galen *Protrepticus* 9–14; Philostratus *Gymnastikos* 44; Athenaeus 10.412d–13c), the sources suggest that the excesses of the athletic body were intensely debated in Classical Athens. Several authors identify a voracious appetite as a well-known attribute of athletes. In Aristophanes (*Peace* 33–5) to eat like a wrestler is synonymous with gluttony. At the beginning of his tirade against athletes Euripides (Fragment 282 Nauck, ll. 4–6) singles out athletes' gluttony as the main reason for their inability to achieve a happy life; they are slaves to their mouths and stomachs. Similarly, in Euripides' *Antiope* (Fragment 20 Kambitsis), those who lack wealth and overindulge in physical training have unbridled appetites and thus make bad citizens. Achaïos, a tragic poet contemporary with Euripides, also associates athletic exercise with overeating and the athletic body with luxury (Fragments 3–4 Snell). (On the excesses and dangers of the athletic diet, see also Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.14.3; Plato *Republic* 338c–d; Aristotle *Politics* 1338b40–9a10; and Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106b.)

These views seem to have been influenced by the principles and findings of the medical profession. In the Hippocratic corpus, which for the most part contains medical texts from the Classical period, diet and exercise are two cornerstones of healing. Furthermore, references to athletes and athletic practices are often used as case studies to elucidate techniques of diagnosis and cure (Visa 1992). The dictum, "The condition of the athlete is not natural. A healthy state is superior in every respect" (Hippocrates *On Nutriment* 34), sometimes quoted as a condensed version of medical views on overspecialized athletes (Marcovich 1977: 54 and 1978: 26), comes from a treatise most probably written in the third century or later (see von Staden 1989: 77). Nevertheless, other Hippocratic works dated to the Classical period also reveal a preoccupation with the exaggerations of athletic diets, especially the overconsumption of meat (see, for example, *Regimen in Health* 7). This state of affairs, in conjunction with overspecialization in training, was believed to result in the disfigurement of athletes' bodies (Hippocrates *Aphorisms* 1.3; cf. Xenophon *Symposium* 2.17 and Aristotle *On the Generation of Animals* 768b29–33). Moreover, according to Plato, athletic diets and training induce drowsiness and sloth, and as a result athletes "sleep their lives away" (*Republic* 403e–4a; see also *Lovers* 132c); their habits should, therefore, be forsaken by those who, owing to their station in life, need to be active and vigilant.

Certainly there is a degree of rhetorical exaggeration in all this, but the thematic and chronological proximity of these arguments cannot be coincidental. How can this preoccupation of Classical Athenian

authors with the excesses and distortions of the athletic body be explained? The stereotype of the gluttonous, overspecialized athlete who is skillful only in sport is related to the antithesis between athletic training and military skill that goes back at least as far as Tyrtaeus. It is also part of a wider discourse on gastric insatiability (Gargiulo 1982; Steiner 2002). Yet it appears that in Classical Athens the image of the meat-devouring, disfigured athletic body acquires further connotations that contrast it to the stereotype of the adequately trained, militarily efficient, and politically involved body of the ideal citizen. Concerns about athletic diets and intensive training may reflect a realization that active, full-time athletes had little choice but to abstain from many aspects of familial, social, and political life in order to train for competition (Plato *Laws* 807c). Such considerations converged and shaped an image of an overfed, overtrained, and by implication civically inefficient athletic body, which had an affinity with the body of the *apragmon*, that is, the indifferent, often socially isolated, and hence civically dysfunctional citizen (Carter 1986; Christ 2006). In other words, for some in democratic Athens, the physically transgressive athletic body partly embodied the qualities of the anticitizen.

The preceding discussion strongly suggests that in the Greek world sport practices, perceptions, and representations were intimately bound up with wider social and political issues. Sport often functioned as a symbol of inequality and difference, and at times political conflicts and class considerations elicited an opposition to particular sport practices and resulted in attempts to redefine the ideological boundaries of those practices. Hippotrophy (the keeping of horses for display or competition) and horse racing in Classical Athens offer a case in point. In opposition to those who extolled the honor that horse racing victories bestowed on the city, some Athenian voters opted to ostracize members of well-heeled families on the grounds of their horse breeding. Meanwhile playwrights and orators ridiculed and deprecated the obsession of the upper class with horses (for testimonia, see Golden 1997 and Papakonstantinou 2003).

These oppositional discourses on the value of horse breeding and equestrian victories were cogently articulated in the case of Alcibiades' Olympic triumphs. In the Olympics of 416, equestrian teams owned by Alcibiades, at that time a young and rising Athenian politician from a wealthy family, took first, second, and fourth place in the four-horse chariot race.³ Alcibiades himself, in a speech to the Athenian people sitting in the Assembly, emphasized the benefits that accrued to the city from his equestrian victory at Olympia (Thucydides 6.16.2). Moreover, in a speech written for Alcibiades' son, Isocrates unequivocally presents Alcibiades' proclivity for

equestrian contests and his quest for Olympic glory as tokens of social elitism when he claims that Alcibiades disdained athletic contests on account of the low birth of some athletes and thus pursued horse breeding, which was accessible only to the wealthy (16.33; see Miller 2004: no. 67 for a translation). Isocrates was not alone in employing elitist language in connection with sport. A few decades before, a conservative author (Old Oligarch *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.13, 2.10) described the athletic practices of Athenians in terms of class divisions. He claimed that the rabble had appropriated aristocrats' sport activities and symbols. He also asserted that the populace required the rich to subsidize their festivals and athletic facilities, and that the poor did all they could to enrich themselves at the expense of the wealthy.

Such select critiques of athletic practices, even though they did not comprehensively aim at the entire range of sport activities, are nonetheless significant because they reveal aspects of the ideological exploitation of sport in the context of power struggles in democratic Athens. At stake were contentious issues such as the proper way to expend one's wealth, and the degree to which certain groups could derive social distinction through sport. Hence the attacks on the value of equestrian victories or the resentment over the engagement of the populace with sport were not, as has been claimed (Kyle 2007: 173), disjointed comments used mostly for rhetorical effect. The rhetoric about sport was part and parcel of a wider debate on elite and popular power in democratic Athens (Ober 1989). Hence attacks on elite hippotrophy act cumulatively in conjunction with other invectives against elite sport, as well as with other facets of elite and middling ideologies.

A unilateral focus on critics might easily mislead; despite the ideological controversies concerning sport, Athens honored its numerous victors at the Panhellenic games with monetary prizes, free meals for life, front-row seats at public festivals, and possibly more (Kyle 1987: 21–2, 145–7; Morrissey 1978). In addition, the extensive Athenian calendar of athletic contests is another indication of the popularity of sport in Classical Athens. Even though some accepted the stereotype of the self-indulgent, civically useless athlete, there should be little doubt that most Athenians enjoyed athletic spectacles and treated successful athletes with respect rather than contempt. The case of Athens underscores why it is critical to evaluate eulogies and diatribes about sport in connection with a broader nexus of athletic practices, ideological conflicts, and social relationships.

4 Critiques of Greek Sport in the Age of Empires

The territorial expansion of the Greek-speaking world in the Hellenistic period (323–31) brought a geographical and quantitative proliferation of athletic facilities and competitive sport. The situation was similar after the Romans took over the Greek-speaking East. As might be expected, in shifting political and social environments the meaning of sport also changed in some respects. These changes are partly reflected in the criticisms against athletes and sport that surface in sources of this era.

A number of authors attribute critical views on sport to prominent figures of this period, including Alexander the Great. Plutarch, writing in the second century CE (*Alexander* 4.5–6; *Moralia* 179d, 331b), claims that Alexander disliked athletes and that he expressed a studied disinterest in competing at Olympia. Moreover, according to the same author (*Moralia* 180a, 334d), Alexander did not consider sport conducive to military effectiveness, a view that Plutarch attributes to other prominent Classical and Hellenistic figures as well (*Moralia* 192c–d; *Philopoemen* 3.2–4). Even if one accepts the attribution of such views to Alexander and other Hellenistic leaders, it is immediately obvious that in an era of vast empires and mercenary armies the issue of the military inefficiency of athletes had a different import from the sentiments expressed by Tyrtaeus or Euripides, both of whom were active during periods when most soldiers came from among the ranks of citizens. Moreover, it is worth noting that Plutarch himself and other late sources record that Alexander respected and honored athletic victors (Plutarch *Alexander* 34.2; Arrian *Anabasis* 2.15.2; Pausanias 7.27.7). Furthermore, during his campaign in the East he sponsored several athletic contests. These contests had more than mere entertainment value; they promoted integration and morale in the Macedonian camp and represented Greek culture in the newly conquered lands. (On Alexander's views on sport, see Adams 2007 and, in this volume, Chapter 22.)

Hence Plutarch's reports that Alexander disdained sport may tell us more about Plutarch himself and his era than Alexander's actual views on the subject. Recent work (König 2005; Newby 2005) has highlighted the complex manner in which literary works of the Roman Imperial period (31 BCE–476 CE) represented sport, especially events and personalities of bygone eras. Some authors of that period continue to attack athletes on the basis of long-established themes (e.g., overeating, bodily deformities, incompatibility with military pursuits, worthlessness for state affairs). But there are also some marked

differences and novel topics of denigration, for example, the claim made by some authors that athletes are unfit for any kind of intellectual work because they are mentally incapable of it (Dio Chrysostom *Orations* 8.14; Galen *Protrepticus* 9–13).

Certain authors were not monolithic in their views. Dio has positive things to say in other parts of his work about sport, an inconsistency that has been explained (König 2005: 97–157) on the basis of an unresolved tension over the attainment of athletic beauty and philosophical virtue. Moreover, Galen's vitriolic attacks on the mental abilities of athletes and his categorization of them as performers of a base and dishonorable profession may have been driven in part by the fact that Galen, himself a medical doctor, had a strong antipathy for athletic trainers (König 2005: 254–300; cf. Pleket 1975: 82–4). Yet even if the image of the dimwitted athlete was one largely confined to literary discourses, it is still a notable departure from earlier arguments that maintained that athletes could not pursue intellectual matters because their lives were engrossed in training and competition (Young 2005: 30).

Two obvious and vexing questions arise out of the complex network of anti-athletic discourses outlined in this essay: what did the athletes themselves think of the attacks leveled at them and how did they respond to these challenges? For the Hellenistic and Roman periods, numerous inscriptions honoring the lives and deeds of particular athletes provide an indirect glimpse into the convictions of the real sport protagonists. These inscriptions are often formulaic, panegyric, and at times verbose (Moretti 1953; Robert 1968; König 2005: 102–32). But to a certain extent they do show distinct thematic patterns, and therefore they can serve as responses to the arguments raised by critics. The inscriptions emphasize the strength and grace (both elements reinforced by athletic statuary and practices in the *gymnasion*, see Dickie 1993) of the athletic body, the physical and often moral magnitude of athletic victory, as well as the glory bestowed on the successful athlete. Recent studies (van Nijf 1999, 2001, 2003) have demonstrated that, beyond mere personal and familial pride, athletic training and performance were key elements in the self-representation of elites as well as in the process of shaping a wider Greek cultural identity in Greek communities in the eastern Mediterranean during the Roman period. Contrary to some critics, the athletic body was seen as representing key civic values such as manliness and virtue.

Echoes of ancient tirades about Greek sport practices and the athletic body survive to our own day through the influence of Christianity. Aware of the omnipresence of sport, early Christians appropriated Greek agonistic language and imagery (Pfitzner 1967;

Merkelbach 1975: 108–36; Koch 2007), which they combined with attacks on the pagan context of Greek sport. They also propagated principles of bodily discipline and renunciation (Feichtinger and Seng 2004). For them, the body was subservient to intellect and soul and often an impediment to the believer's salvation. Understandably, these notions contributed to the abolition of Greek agonistic festivals. (On Roman-era criticisms of sport, including more on Christian views on sport, see Chapter 41.)

5 Conclusion

Despite its enormous popularity, over the centuries Greek sport attracted its share of criticism, sometimes from notable public figures and intellectuals. The strictures aimed at athletes and sport were related to pressing issues of the day (e.g., military effectiveness, governance, social distinction) or the intellectual and professional agenda of the author. There is evidence to suggest that in certain cases some of the arguments in question were accepted by some segments of the population. In other instances anti-athletic discourses seem to have been confined largely to literary, rhetorical, and scientific debates. Rhetorical exaggerations aside, these debates provide invaluable insights into facets of a continually evolving ideological contestation and negotiation over the meaning and social value of Greek sport in Greco-Roman antiquity.

NOTES

- ¹ All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated. On sport in the Bronze Age, see Chapter 2 in this volume.
- ² There has been an extended scholarly debate over the extent to which sport was or was not dominated by societal elites in the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods. That debate has tended to focus on the situation in Athens, primarily for evidentiary reasons. Pritchard (2003, 2009) has argued that sport was largely the preserve of a small, very wealthy elite straight through the fifth century. Fisher (1998, 2011) and Christesen (2012: 164–83) have argued that starting in the sixth century males from prosperous but not extremely affluent households began participating in sport in large numbers.
- ³ In some versions of the story, Alcibiades' horses won first, second,

and third. See Plutarch *Alcibiades* 11.1–3 and Thucydides 6.16.2.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Müller 1995 examines the evidence for Greek and Roman critics of ancient sport. Young 2005 is a stimulating discussion of select sources bearing on the opposition of mind versus the athletic body in the ancient Greek world. Bernardini 1980 and Visa-Ondarçuhu 1999 are useful overviews of the evidence from the Archaic and Early Classical periods. Kyle 1987: 124–54 discusses Athenian critics of sport. König 2005 and Newby 2005 highlight the intertwined and complex nature of sport discourses during the Roman Imperial period. Crowther 2004 contains a number of essays relevant to the subject matter of this

chapter.

Several articles provide detailed, insightful discussions of sport criticisms by particular ancient authors; these articles include, but are by no means limited to, Marcovich 1977 and 1978; Giannini 1982; Golden 1997; Iannucci 1998; and Harris 2009.

CHAPTER 22

Sport, Spectacle, and Society in Ancient Macedonia

Winthrop Lindsay Adams

1 Introduction

The theme of this volume is the role of sport and spectacle in society, and, in the case of Macedonia, these topics are intertwined from the beginning, as well as inexorably connected with Macedonians' ethnic identity. Although sources for early Macedonian history, beyond foundation legends, are sketchy, they deal primarily with the light thrown on the subject by the Persian interest in and invasions of Greece at the end of the Archaic period (700–480 BCE¹). The key figure is King Alexander I “Philhellenos” (reigned c.495–c.450), who played a complex political game that included shifting alliances and allegiances with both Persians and Greeks. Alexander I used sport, and specifically the Olympics, to identify with the Greeks (or more importantly to permit them to identify with him). In a story recounted by Herodotus (5.22), which Herodotus claims to have heard personally from Alexander himself, Alexander had wanted to compete in the *stadion* race at the Olympics, but was challenged by the other Greek athletes on the grounds that he was *not* a Greek, but a *barbaros*.² Alexander then claimed descent from the royal family (the Temenids) that in mythical times ruled the Greek city of Argos, and this was accepted by the *Hellandikai* (the officials who presided over the Olympic Games, see Chapters 8 and 17). He was allowed to compete, but the race ended in a dead heat, and Alexander declined a rematch, giving up any chance of the victory. The fact that Alexander chose competing at Olympia as the method of declaring his own and his dynasty's Greek ethnicity shows that sport and ethnicity were tied together from the start in Macedonia. Also, this challenge to the Greek

ethnicity of both the Argead House and the Macedonians remained a leitmotif throughout the Classical period (480–323), and sport was one of the means by which Macedonia answered that ethnic question.

2 Sources

The history of sport, spectacle, and society in Macedonia started at the top and largely remained tied to the Argead House through the rest of the Classical period. The key figures, as with all else in this period, are Philip II (reigned 359–336) and Alexander the Great (reigned 336–323), and by extension the sources connected to them are also pivotal. In the Hellenistic period (323–31), although the number and breadth of extant literary sources drops off, the archaeological remains, inscriptions, and variety of sources grow remarkably and expand to include some of the best evidence that we have for community and sport in Greek history.

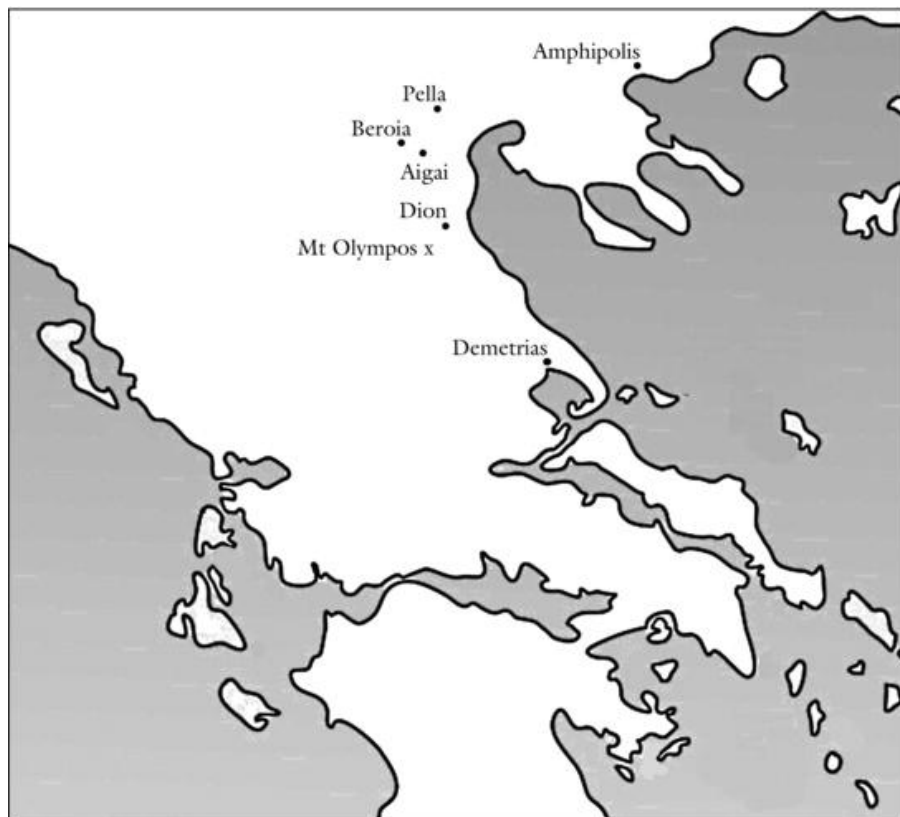
The majority of the sources for Macedonia, and for sport in Macedonia, down to the reign of Philip II are familiar to most students of Greek history. The historical narratives of Herodotus and Thucydides, both written in the fifth century, are important, though references to Macedonia are ancillary to their main themes. Xenophon's *Hellenika* and the work of Athenian orators such as Demosthenes, Isocrates, and Aeschines, all produced in the fourth century, are useful, though they must be employed with caution. The *Parallel Lives* and the *Moralia* of Plutarch, who wrote in the latter part of the first and early part of the second centuries CE, are both valuable. Another important source, especially dealing with Olympia, is the *Description of Greece* written by Pausanias in the second half of the second century CE.

Some other important sources are less well known outside of specialists in Greek and Macedonian history. The *Philippic History* of Pompeius Trogus was written in the first century and is the only complete history of Greece to survive from the ancient world, but does so through a fourth century CE abridgement (the *Epitome* of Pompeius Trogus by Justin). Philip, Alexander, and Macedonia featured prominently in Trogus, and hence in Justin as well. Diodorus Siculus's *Library of History*, also written in the first century, recounted events in both Greek and Roman history from the earliest periods to Diodorus's own lifetime, but less than half of the work survives in complete form. Fortunately, this includes the events in Greece for the fifth and fourth centuries down to 301. Diodorus drew extensively on the work of contemporary historians and documents that are now lost to us. Justin

and Diodorus, along with Plutarch, represent three of the five major sources for Alexander the Great. The other two are important texts that focus solely on Alexander's reign. The first of those is Arrian, a second century CE Roman politician, general, and author, who wrote the *Anabasis of Alexander* and the *Indica*, which provide vital information on Alexander. Arrian also gives particularly important insights into Alexander's interest in sport and spectacle. Finally, Quintus Curtius Rufus, a first century CE Roman politician and historian, wrote a *History of Alexander* that contains a good deal of useful material, especially on Macedonian customs, though the first two books of his account have not survived.

Finally, there is a remarkable (and growing) amount of archaeological evidence from excavated sites in Macedonia such as Vergina (ancient Aigai, the ancestral capital of Macedonia); Pella (the administrative capital of Macedonia from the late fifth century onwards); Dion (an important Macedonian religious site at the foot of Mt Olympos); Amphipolis (an important city on the border between Macedonia and Thrace that was incorporated into the Macedonian state by Philip II); and Demetrias (a large city and naval base near Thessaloniki) (see [Map 22.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay). Among the numerous relevant inscriptions resulting from the archaeological finds, one stands out as overwhelmingly important: the Gymnasiarchal Decree from Beroia, a relatively small city in Macedonia. This inscription dates to the second century BCE and contains a virtually complete set of regulations for the operation of Beroia's *gymnasion*. From all of these sources a remarkable amount of material on sport and spectacle can be retrieved, and it equally demonstrates the vital role these played in Macedonian society and its Greek ethnic self-identification.

Map 22.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



3 Macedonians and Sport Outside the Kingdom

The sports program in Macedonia falls into two unequal categories: sports that reflect a Greek, indeed specifically Olympic program, and sporting events that were almost uniquely northern pastimes not reflected in the Olympic Games themselves. The first category has two elements: participation by Macedonians in the Olympics and other Panhellenic athletic contests held in central and southern Greece and Olympic style events held in Macedonia itself. Here the pattern is familiar, as it initially reflects the role of the kings. This begins with Alexander I and the *stadion* story found in Herodotus, mentioned earlier, but Justin also mentions that Alexander participated in “various Olympic events,” not just the *stadion* (7.2.14). Moreover, the poet Pindar, writing in the early fifth century and hence during Alexander’s lifetime, refers to an athletic victory by a son of Amyntas (“*pai . . . Amynta*”), which in this context can only be Alexander I

(Fragments 120–1 Snell).³ Given the occasions for which Pindar's poetry was written, it is probable that the victory in question was won at one of the major Panhellenic athletic festivals.

The next certain reference to this kind of participation involves King Archelaos (reigned 412–399). Solinus (9.16), a Latin grammarian of the third century CE, refers to Archelaos winning the *tethrippon* (the four-horse chariot race) at both the Olympic and the Pythian Games, which expands the royal sports program to include chariot racing.⁴ As we will see, Archelaos also had a considerable role in fostering Olympic-style sport inside Macedonia.

After Archelaos's assassination in 399 Macedonia suffered a long period of serious political instability, and there is no record of any victories by Macedonians at the major Panhellenic festivals until the reign of Philip II, from which point we are on much stronger ground. Philip won victories in the equestrian events at Olympia on three separate occasions: in the horse race in 356 and in the four-horse chariot race in 352 and 348 (Plutarch *Alexander* 3.5 and 4.5; Moretti 1957: nos. 434, 438, and 445). According to Plutarch, Alexander the Great was a talented runner and was encouraged by both his friends and his father to compete in the Olympic Games (*Alexander* 4.5; *Moralia* 179b and 331b; see also Adams 2007: 125–6). Alexander did not run at Olympia, though he did sponsor a number of athletic competitions.

During the Hellenistic period Macedonian Olympic victors began to come from outside the royal family. After Alexander's death Macedonians won the *stadion* at the Olympic Games on multiple occasions. A Macedonian named Antiochos won the event in 292 and 288, and another, Seleukos, did the same in 268 (Moretti 1957: nos. 527, 533, 543). This is an important point, as it means that acceptance of the Macedonians themselves, not just their kings, as Greeks was now sanctioned by the officials in charge of the Olympic Games. Macedonians from outside the royal family also began to compete in the equestrian events at Olympia. Lampos, from the town of Philippi, won the four-horse chariot race in 304 (Pausanias 6.4.10 and Moretti 1957: no. 498). A Macedonian woman, Belistiche, won the four-colt chariot race in 268 and the two-colt chariot race in 264 (Pausanias 5.8.11 and Moretti 1957: nos. 549, 552; see also Chapter 16 in this volume).

4 Sport inside Macedonia

There is clear evidence, then, of Macedonians competing outside the

kingdom in premier running events (the *stadion*), possibly the pentathlon, and in various equestrian events, but what of sport within the kingdom? Here we go back to Archelaos, who founded a festival in honor of Zeus and the Nine Muses at Dion. Arrian says that this festival included both musical and athletic contests, the latter designed specifically along the lines of the Olympic program (*ta agones . . . ta Olympika*) (*Anabasis of Alexander* 1.11.1).⁵ Unfortunately there is no record of whether all, or, alternatively, which part, of the Olympic program was held, but there may be some clues in the sources about other forms of athletic competitions that Macedonians seem to have particularly enjoyed.

Some insight on the range of sports played in Macedonia can be gleaned from an incident reported by Polyaeus, who in the second century CE produced a handbook that collected successful military stratagems employed in a variety of times and places. According to Polyaeus, Philip II was accosted by his soldiers regarding overdue pay while he was wrestling in the *palaistra* (wrestling compound) at Pella with one Menagetes, a famous pankratiast and boxer (*Stratagems* 4.2.6; on *palaistrai*, which frequently formed part of *gymnasia*, see Chapter 19). Philip avoided them by continuing his exercises and then jumping into a pool and swimming around until the soldiers tired and left. A *palaistra* and pool have been found next to one another in the royal quarters at Pella (Siganidou and Lilimpaki-Akamati 1997: 14–17), confirming the setting for the story and possibly its veracity.⁶ This would establish that all three disciplines (wrestling, boxing, and the *pankration*) were practiced in Macedonia.

Accounts of the military campaigns of Alexander the Great also provide relevant information. Athenaeus (12.539c) reports that two of Alexander's generals, Perdikkas and Krateros, "being lovers of sport, always had in their baggage piles of goatskins that would cover a *stadion* . . . under cover of which they would exercise" (539c, trans. C. Gulick, slightly modified). The use of the term *stadion*, employed both as a unit of distance (600 feet) and a label for an athletic space of that size, to describe the exercise area used by Perdikkas and Krateros suggests that they were practicing track and field events such as running or throwing the javelin. Plutarch claims that Leonnatos, another of Alexander's generals, transported on camels from Egypt special dust that he used while exercising (*Alexander* 40.1). Greek males typically stripped and applied a light coating of olive oil to their skin before exercise. Men who were going to wrestle or compete in the *pankration* (something akin to modern-day ultimate fighting) frequently sprinkled dust on top of the olive oil (see Chapter 13, which includes an excursus on athletic nudity). This story suggests that Leonnatos was fond of at least one of these sports. Evidence that

this love of sports was widespread in the army comes from Strabo (15.1.67), who states that while Alexander's army was in India large numbers of local craftsmen devoted themselves to making strigils (used to scrape oil off after exercise) and flasks for olive oil.

Similar evidence comes from archaeological sites in Macedonia. The *palaistra* at Pella has already been mentioned. Though no stadia have as yet been found at Pella, Aigai, or Dion, theaters, used for the musical contests that accompanied the athletic events at the festival for Zeus and the Nine Muses, have been excavated at Aigai and Dion (Andronikos 1984: 98; Borza 1990: 173–4, respectively). Excavations at Demetrias, a city founded by Demetrios Poliorketes when he was king of Macedonia in the early third century, have revealed a theater and one end of a stadium, which matches literary descriptions of the intermingling of athletic and dramatic contests at Dion (Batziou-Efstathiou 2002: 16 (overall plan), 25–6 (stadium), 33–6 (theater)).

The best physical evidence comes from Amphipolis, a city founded by Athens in 437 and incorporated into Macedonia by Philip II in the mid-fourth century. On the southern side of the acropolis there is an extensive athletic area, referred to by modern-day local residents as “the Steps,” where excavations have revealed a massive complex. This encompassed several structures including a *palaistra*, a *paradromis* (a covered track), and a sophisticated bath complex, in addition to the Steps themselves, which are part of a stadium or theater (Lazarides 1997: 14–20 and Winter 2006: 124–5).

The single most important piece of evidence for sport in Macedonia is an inscription, typically known as the Gymnasiarchal Decree of Beroia, that dates to c.180.⁷ This decree's name is a modern appellation that reflects its contents, which include a number of provisions regarding Beroia's gymnasiarch, a public official who was responsible for running a *gymnasion* (on gymnasiarchs, see Chapter 6). The decree, inscribed on two sides of a marble slab, states the reasons for (and proposal of) a law to govern community sponsorship of athletic training in an existing *gymnasion*. It lays out how to sponsor athletic training and choose officials who would manage the *gymnasion* (on Side A). On the reverse side it gives the regulations for dealing with *paides* (boys), *neaniskoi* (youths), and *epheboi* (young men in military training) who used the *gymnasion*;⁸ detailed provisions for the celebration at the *gymnasion* of an annual religious festival (the Hermaia) and accompanying athletic contests; and rules regarding the punishment of thefts committed at the *gymnasion* and the disposition of fines collected there.

The point was to display these regulations publicly and provide transparency for finances and fines *as was done in other cities* (Side A, ll. 5–9). The emphasis is mine, and there is every reason to assume

that the “other cities” mentioned in the decree included communities in both Macedonia and the rest of the Greek mainland. There are references not only to Beroia’s *gymnasion*, but also to other *palaistrai* (*alla palaistrai*) not sponsored by public funds (Side B, l. 4). That points to the existence of sports complexes supported by the city, as well as private establishments. It also implies training for both running and wrestling events (and logically as well for boxing and the *pankration*). In terms of special activities, the decree refers to practice at the javelin and archery for the *epheboi* (Side B, ll. 10–11).

A special section deals with the festival of the Hermaia, in honor of Hermes (probably the patron deity of the city). This festival included contests in physique (*euexia*), discipline (*eutaxia*), and endurance (*philoponia*) (Side B, ll. 47–8).⁹ The most elaborate part of the decree deals with the *lampadedromeia*, a series of torch relay races for the *paides* and *neaniskoi*. The decree specifies prizes as well as procedures for choosing judges for the event and three leaders (*lampadarchontes*) for each team, with the leaders being responsible for supplying members of their team with oil for 10 days (Side B, ll. 59–84). Clearly this was the most important aspect of the Hermaia, probably the culminating events. Torch relay races, in which the winning team was the first to get a runner to the finish line (frequently an altar) with a lit torch, were not part of the Olympic program, but do show up in other Greek cities such as Athens (Kyle 1987: 190–3).¹⁰

The form and function of Beroia’s *gymnasion* and of the Hermaia are typically Greek, and the fact that the residents of Beroia sought to arrange athletic activities “as other cities do” indicates that this was not coincidental. In fact, the form sport took in Beroia in the second century shows every sign of having been typical of the Hellenistic world as a whole, including not only places such as Athens, but also Ai Khanum (Afghanistan) at the other end of the Hellenistic Greek world.¹¹ Sport clearly was part of Greek ethnic “branding” both inside and outside of Macedonia.

This brings us to the subject of sporting events that were almost uniquely northern pastimes not reflected in the Olympic Games themselves. Plutarch states that Alexander liked to fight with staves (*Alexander* 4.11), which may have been a northern pastime perhaps fitting into the *eutaxia* exercises. Torch relay races, and especially the mounted versions, would fit this category. These were a feature of the contests staged by Alexander, and involving the army, during the campaigns in the East. Altogether Alexander put on some 15 of these sets of games (not counting the funeral games for Philip, his impromptu race around Troy in honor of Achilles, or his own funeral games). Usually these were intended to help the army to relax, though there were a number of occasions on which they served propaganda

purposes and fit into the category of spectacle. Down to the point the army actually entered Persia proper, these contests usually involved horseback torch relays. After that these were replaced with *agones hippika*, equestrian contests without the torches, probably out of regard to Persian religious practice (Adams 2007: 135–7 and *passim*). There may have been other sports that were closely linked to Macedonia, as many regions had their own unique versions of sporting events, such as the Sicilian love of the *apene* (mule-cart races) and the *kalpe* (the dismount race, in which the rider ran alongside the horse for the last leg of the race) (see Chapter 12). By and large, however, the sports enjoyed by the Macedonians would have been much the same as those practiced among and within other parts of the Greek world.

5 Spectacles

To discuss “spectacle” properly in the Macedonian context, a definition is in order. In the Macedonian case, “spectacle” would probably involve (1) an occasion conceived on a grand scale and carried out in a proper setting, (2) the breadth of the elements involved, and (3) a deliberate purpose. The history of Macedonia provides many celebrations that fit this definition, and almost invariably sport was part of those celebrations.

Archelaos established the first and most enduring of these celebrations in the “Olympia,” a nine-day festival in honor of Zeus and the Muses. These festivities involved both athletic and dramatic contests (*Anabasis of Alexander* 1.11.1), but Arrian stresses that the athletic games were conducted in Olympic fashion (*ton agona en Aigeis dietheke ta Olympia*).¹² Arrian describes Alexander the Great’s celebrations as coming at the end of the Balkan campaigns of 335, though these games were also intended to raise his men’s spirits “for the *agones* that lay ahead” in the Persian campaigns (Diodorus Siculus 17.16.3). Dio Chrysostom (*Peri Basileia* 2.2) sets a (fictional) dialogue between Philip and Alexander at Dion where they were “sacrificing to the Muses and celebrating the Olympic festival,” which “was an ancient institution in that country.” The timing and reasons for the celebration, even the descriptions, are similar, but the sites are different. The two separate locations present some difficulties, unless the dramatic competitions were held on one site (say Aigai) and the religious and athletic ones at the other (Dion). It is possible that they may have alternated sites, or that it was the presence of the king that mattered wherever it was held. Regardless, the “Olympic festival”

provided the model for other spectacles, and the sources bear this out.

Another example of Macedonian spectacle is the marriage of Philip's daughter, Cleopatra, in the spring of 336, and this time not in the context of the end of the campaigning season, but a prelude to one: Philip's imminent invasion of the Persian Empire. Diodorus (16.91.5) states that Philip invited dignitaries from all over the Greek world to the lavish wedding celebrations, for which Philip planned fabulous dramatic contests (*euchias agonas te mousikous*). Diodorus also refers simply to "the games" (*ton agonon*, 16.92.1 and 5), which could easily denote athletic contests. But Philip had much more in mind: a grand parade of statues of the 12 Olympian deities, elaborately displayed, and followed by a thirteenth statue of Philip himself "enthroned among" them (16.93.5). The theater was packed, and Philip instructed his bodyguards to draw away as he came into the theater. As Philip entered, one of his bodyguards attacked and killed him. Not the spectacle Philip had in mind, but nevertheless revealing. It was meant as a grand gesture, mounted for the crowds, filled with feasting, wine and song, and games, all of which were done in the Greek fashion. Perhaps Alexander's games at Aigai a year later were, in part, designed to erase the picture of Philip's death, but regardless were equally designed as spectacle and a symbol of Macedonia's Greek connections.

Alexander found many more occasions for spectacle. As mentioned, Alexander the Great put on games throughout his campaigns in the East. If one looks to the analogy of a Greek army as a mobile city, this was a Macedonian one, and the frequency with which games were mounted (15 times in 11 years) show that they were more than annual. Further, these games always involved sport, and frequently dramatic contests as well, fitting the Macedonian pattern. But on a number of occasions they went far beyond that. Following the long-drawn-out siege of Tyre in 332, Alexander sacrificed to Herakles and conducted a parade of his forces under arms. This was accompanied by a naval review in honor of Herakles, athletic games in the temple enclosure of Herakles, and a relay torch race (Arrian *Anabasis of Alexander* 2.24.6; cf. Diodorus Siculus 17.46.6). The point was to drive home Macedonian supremacy, for both the army in terms of its achievements and for the local population that had opposed it. Clearly, Philip's festival at Aigai had its political point, and Alexander had learned the lesson.

Nor did it end there. When Alexander entered Egypt (still in 332), he sacrificed to the gods at Memphis and "held athletic and musical games" (Arrian *Anabasis of Alexander* 3.1.4). Arrian adds that "the most famous performers in both athletics and music came to him there from Greece." In terms of spectacle, Alexander was raising the stakes,

but also making it unmistakably Greek. The previous games had only involved the army as contestants. Now Alexander was using games as a display of Greek civilization. The next year, Alexander topped even this, once more at Tyre. He summoned ambassadors to him, and held athletic and dramatic contests, including dithyrambic choruses and whole tragedies (Plutarch *Alexander* 29.1) in a clear attempt not only to demonstrate Greek culture to those ambassadors, but arguably also to remind his army of who they were as they set out on what was hoped to be the final confrontation with Darius III. Plutarch states that these were performed brilliantly and that an Athenian actor, Athenodoros, was fined by Athens for missing the main Athenian dramatic festival, the Dionysia, which he had done deliberately in order to perform in Tyre. Alexander, therefore, chose this spectacle to set the scene for his campaign to defeat Darius, which he did later that summer of 331, and to make that effort clearly Greek.

Plutarch's claim that Alexander had a dislike of the "race of athletes" (*Alexander* 4.11), is clearly dispelled by Alexander's staging of games and his use of professional athletes in them. Indeed, there were a number of famous athletes on his staff (Adams 2007: 125). A famous incident that took place during Alexander's eastern campaigns provided a spectacle (albeit restricted to the army) and involved a professional athlete, an Athenian named Dioxippos, who won an uncontested victory (*akoniti*) in *pankration* at the Olympics, probably in 336 (Moretti 1957: no. 458). Following an incident at a court function during the Indian campaign, one of Alexander's *hetairoi* (companions – elite cavalry), Korrhagos, challenged Dioxippos to a duel (Quintus Curtius Rufus 9.7.16–22; Diodorus Siculus 17.100–1; see also Adams 2007: 127–9). Korrhagos was in full Macedonian panoply, while Dioxippos chose to fight naked, armed only with a club. The contest was short: Dioxippos ducked a thrown javelin, then knocked aside Korrhagos's spear and broke the shaft, and as Korrhagos went for his sword, Dioxippos tripped him up and stepped on his neck. The Macedonians, including Alexander, went away angry, while the Greeks cheered.

The incident is frequently cited as an example of bad blood and ill feeling between Macedonians and Greeks in Alexander's army, though as Dioxippos was an Athenian, one could argue equally it was bad will between Athens and Macedonia or (more plausibly) a personal animus between Dioxippos and some of Alexander's *hetairoi*. Subsequently a plot by the losers brought a false charge of stealing against Dioxippos, and he took his own life. But Curtius notes that up to this point Dioxippos had been a favorite (*gratus*) of Alexander (9.7.16) and Alexander later regretted the death of an honorable man falsely accused. But the point here is that it was a staged event, a spectacle,

with both contestants playing to the crowd for entertainment – although with unexpected results all around.

Though games were held through the rest of the campaign (three in India and one in Carmania), there were no more spectacles until the return to Persia proper from the Indian campaign. An elaborate set of games held at Ecbatana in 324 began with the usual sacrifices and involved both athletic and dramatic competitions, interspersed with feasting and drinking bouts (Arrian *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.14.1–2). During the course of these games Alexander's friend and *chiliarch* (second in command), Hephaistion, took ill. On the seventh day of the competitions, while Alexander was attending the boys' footrace, he was informed that Hephaistion was dying. That death provided what would be the last opportunity Alexander had to put on a spectacle: Hephaistion's funeral games. Alexander intended them as a contemporary rival to the funeral games for Patroklos in the *Iliad* (on which see Chapter 3). Some three thousand professional competitors and artistic performers were summoned to put these on, again clearly on the familiar model of athletic and dramatic *agones* (Arrian *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.14.10) and again clearly Greek. Ironically, these professionals would also perform at Alexander's own funeral games the next year.

The sources for the Hellenistic period do not yield the same kind of evidence for spectacles put on solely by Macedonian kings, and certainly not from within the kingdom. But Macedonian kings had taken advantage of the Panhellenic athletic festivals to provide a similar result before Alexander the Great. Alexander I Philhellenos's Olympic story has already been told. Philip II presided at least twice over the Pythian Games, once represented by a delegate in 342, but in person in 338 (Adams 2008: 61–2). Alexander used the Olympics of 324 to issue a crucial decree requiring that all Greek cities receive back citizens who had been exiled, as well as his decree calling for divine honors for himself (Quintus Curtius Rufus 10.2.4–8; Diodorus Siculus 18.8.3–5). Cassander (reigned c.317–297) presided over the Nemean Games in 315, in order to demonstrate his mastery of Greece (Diodorus Siculus 19.64.1). Demetrios Poliorketes used the Isthmian Games of 301 to reestablish the Hellenic League founded by Philip in 338, and Demetrios's grandson, Antigonos III Doson (reigned 229–221) refounded the Nemean Games in 222 following his victory at Sellasia (Polybius 2.70.4). These Panhellenic athletic festivals were established spectacles, which the Macedonian kings obviously used to make political points.

One last “spectacular” example to add to our list, though not itself an athletic event, was the circular structure, the Philippeion, constructed by Philip II just inside the entry to the main sanctuary at

Olympia (Pausanias 5.20.10). This building was erected in the wake of the Battle of Chaironeia that gave Philip hegemony over most of mainland Greece. It contained statues of Philip and his family and was no doubt intended to make an enduring political point, perpetually connecting him and his family with Greece's most important Panhellenic site. Spectacles and grand gestures, in the context of sport, were a mainstay of the Macedonian monarchy.

6 Conclusion: Society

Our narrative of sport and spectacle in Macedonia started with the kings and royal family, simply because our first examples are from then and thus represent a logical place to start. But it is equally clear that the connection between the Macedonian kings, sport, and spectacle became a reflection of Macedonian society itself. Archelaos launched a broad Hellenizing program largely based on Athenian culture. Attic Greek was adopted as the language used at court and for decrees, as was Attic commercial law and ultimately standards of weights and measures. During the Peloponnesian War, Archelaos's Macedonia became a refuge for Athenian artists, poets, and playwrights such as Agathon and Euripides (Borza 1993; Edson 1970: 39–42). And it was Archelaos who founded the “Olympia,” probably on the model of the Athenian Panathenaia. As such, sport became as much a vehicle for Hellenization as Attic language and Attic law.

The use of sport by the Argead royal house as a means of self-identification as Greeks, and to project this image of the royal house and the Macedonians to Greeks as Greeks, is clear and was ongoing. But the real success can be seen in the reign of Alexander the Great. The use of sport for his army on the march through Asia Minor and the Near East was not forced, but natural; it was their means of relaxation. Alexander did use it as spectacle as well, for propaganda purposes, but it was much more frequently used for the army's own recreation and entertainment. It was even a means, once in Persia, of incorporating the Persians into the army, through the addition of gymkhana events (something for which the Macedonians and Persians shared a love).

One can argue that following Alexander there really is no question of Macedonia not being considered ethnically Greek, by themselves and by everyone else. Certainly the Near Eastern ethnic communities within the Hellenistic monarchies made no distinction, for them it would be the same as separating the Medes from the Persians would be for the Greeks. Nor did the Romans in the third and second

centuries (the same time period as the Gymnasiarchal Decree) treat Macedonia as anything other than simply another Greek polity, just as they did Epirus, the Aitolian and Achaean Leagues, or the *poleis* of Athens and Sparta. This would lead Strabo (7.9) in the first century to state that “Macedonia, indeed, is part of Greece” (*esti men ouv Hellas kai Makedonia*).¹³

The final proofs of the socializing role of sport in Macedonia can be seen in the Macedonian athletes who competed and won at the Olympic Games. Even more telling is the Gymnasiarchal Decree of Beroia, a small town trying to be like the other towns in Macedonia and southern Greece by establishing an officially sanctioned, financed, and publicly governed athletic program, dating most likely from the period just after the dissolution of the Macedonian monarchy. As a result it can be taken as something they themselves wanted to do, not coming from any outside governing authority. The festival of the Hermaia was their own attempt at both sport and spectacle, and was part of the Macedonian social fabric, one that was Greek. The role of sport and spectacle in Macedonian society and ethnicity was a defining one.

NOTES

1 All dates are BCE unless stated otherwise.

2 Participation in the contests at ancient Olympia was limited to Greeks (see Chapter 8 in this volume). There has been considerable modern scholarly discussion about the story of Alexander competing at Olympia, not least stemming from the fact that no victor is named in the story (and hence it cannot be connected with any particular Olympiad). Since Alexander did not win, there was no record of his participation. For a full discussion, see Adams 2003: 205–6, and notes 5–12. The point here is that Alexander, regardless of the veracity of the tale, used sport to “brand” himself as a Greek.

3 Hammond 1979: 60 makes the case that this probably refers to a victory in the pentathlon, which fits nicely with Justin’s reference to Alexander competing in “various events” (*Olympio certamine vario ludicorum genere contenderet*). See also Kertész 2005: 123.

4 This reference has generated considerable controversy. For a discussion and references, see Adams 2008: 59–60. Among the treasures from the royal burials at Aigai is a bronze tripod, which bears the inscription “I am from the Games of Hera Argaea.” This prize from the athletic contests held at Argos has been dated to the

reign of Perdikkas II (ruled 454–412), and may possibly have been won by him and passed down as an heirloom (Andronikos 1984: 164–6 and fig. 133). However, Perdikkas for most of his reign was preoccupied with struggles for survival against internal rivals and against the external powers of Sparta and Athens, so it is far from certain that he had the time or energy for sport. If the story about Alexander I and the *Hellanolikai* is not true, then some Macedonian king had to win recognition of the Argeads's right to compete at Olympia. If there is no story of a challenge to Philip II as a competitor at Olympia (and given the context of his career and Demosthenes' hostility to Philip there would have been), then Archelaos is the one most likely to have established the Argead claim.

5 For a complete discussion as to whether these were a “Counter Olympics” or just a representation and celebration of Greek sport inside Macedonia, see Adams 2003: 206–7 and 209–10. The former seems unlikely as musical competitions were not held at the Olympic Games, but they did form part of the Pythian and Isthmian Games as well as the Panathenaic Games in Athens. Given Archelaos's interest in adopting both the Athenian dialect as the official language of the Macedonian court and parts of the Athenian law code, he may well have looked to the Panathenaic Games as a model. On the Panathenaic Games, see Chapter 10 and Kyle 1987: 33–9.

6 For a further reference to Philip II and a fondness for wrestling, see Plutarch *Moralia* 602d.

7 The authoritative publication of this inscription can be found in Gauthier and Hatzopoulos 1993, though see also Adams 1995; Cormack 1977: 139–50 and *passim*; and Potter 2012: 127–36. An English translation (and notes on the text) can be found in Lupu 2005: 249–68. Beroia was not a major town, comparable to Pella, Aigai, or Amphipolis, but that makes the decree even more valuable as evidence of a typical Macedonian community and therefore the ethnic identification by residents as being Greek.

8 On age-classes in Greek physical education, see Chapter 14.

9 On these contests, see Crowther 2004: 333–9.

10 The mounted torch relay race in honor of the Thracian Goddess Bendis, the event to which Socrates is hurrying in the opening lines of the *Republic*, demonstrates the importation of a northern Aegean practice into Athens.

11 Potter 2012 dedicates an entire chapter to Beroia (chapter 12, pp. 127–36) and opens with a description of the *gymnasion* at Ai Khanum in Bactria, clearly identifying the Beroia Decree with a

broader Hellenistic phenomenon.

12 Arrian places Alexander's games at Aigai, Diodorus at Dion.

13 See Adams 1995: 205–22 and *passim* and Adams 2005: 1–21.

Strabo is making the statement to reinforce Macedonian Greek ethnicity because he is separating his discussion of Macedonia from Greece topographically.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The seminal work for ancient Macedonian history can be found in Hammond 1972–88. Two good recent volumes contain an array of articles on various aspects of ancient Macedonia and the Hellenistic world: Roisman and Worthington 2010 and Bugh 2006.

For the period down through Philip II, Borza 1990 and 1999 are the best introductions to the subject, especially in terms of the archaeology. On Alexander I, see Borza 1993 and Badian 1994. On Philip, Cawkwell 1978 and Hammond 1994 remain essential, and Hatzopoulos and Loukopoulou 1980 offer an excellent collection of articles by outstanding scholars on various aspects of Philip's career and life. Much interesting work on Philip continues to appear; see, for

instance, Carney and Ogden 2010 and Worthington 2008, and the bibliography cited therein. The already prodigious body of scholarship on Alexander continues to grow each year. Green 1991a is arguably still the best single volume work on Alexander, and his magisterial *Alexander to Actium* (1991b) is equally invaluable. See also now, for example, the articles in Heckel and Tritle 2009.

On the sources for Macedonian history, see Rhodes 2010.

Potter 2012 is an excellent introduction to ancient sport in general, and covers specific Macedonian and Hellenistic topics. Miller 2004 is the single best sourcebook, and includes a complete translation of the Gymnasiarchal Decree of Beroia. There are no book-length studies of Macedonian sport, but there has been considerable discussion of this topic in shorter works, including Adams 2003, 2007, 2008; Bloedow 1998; Brown 1977; Kertész 1999, 2005, 2010; and Romano 1990. The gymnasiarchal law from Beroia has attracted a good deal of attention. The authoritative publication can be found in Gauthier and Hatzopoulos 1993, but see also Cormack 1977 and Lupu 2005: 249–68. Lupu provides a list of the relevant bibliography up through 2005. See now also Potter 2012: 127–36. On the Philippeion at Olympia, see Scott 2010: 210–14 and Schultz 2009 and the bibliography cited therein.

PART IV

Later Greek Sport and Spectacle

CHAPTER 23

Greek Sport in Egypt

Status Symbol and Lifestyle

Sofie Remijsen

1 Introduction

In 332 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered Egypt. From a strictly territorial perspective this immediately made Egypt part of the Greek world. The infiltration of Greek culture naturally went at a slower pace. One aspect of Greek culture that found its way into Egypt was sport.

Sport was of course not new in Egypt. Several sports known in Greece, such as running, wrestling, and boxing, had developed their own independent traditions in Egypt (Decker 2006: 75–93). This essay is not, however, about individual sports and their regional variations, but about the introduction of an institutionalized form of sport and its place in an evolving society. By Greek sport as an institution, I mean the set of physical activities that was taught to young men in *gymnasia* in order to imbue them with specific cultural values, and which made up the program of *agones*, that is, contests with athletic, equestrian, and/or artistic events which were a part of recurring, typically quadrennial, religious festivals organized by Greek cities in honor of a god.

This essay will deal with two opposed but connected questions: what drew the population of Egypt, particularly Greek immigrants, to sport and what obstacles complicated its introduction? I will focus on three key periods: (1) the Early Ptolemaic Kingdom (c.323–c.200 BCE), when Greek sport as an institution was first established in Egypt; (2) the later Hellenistic and Early Roman periods (c.100 BCE–

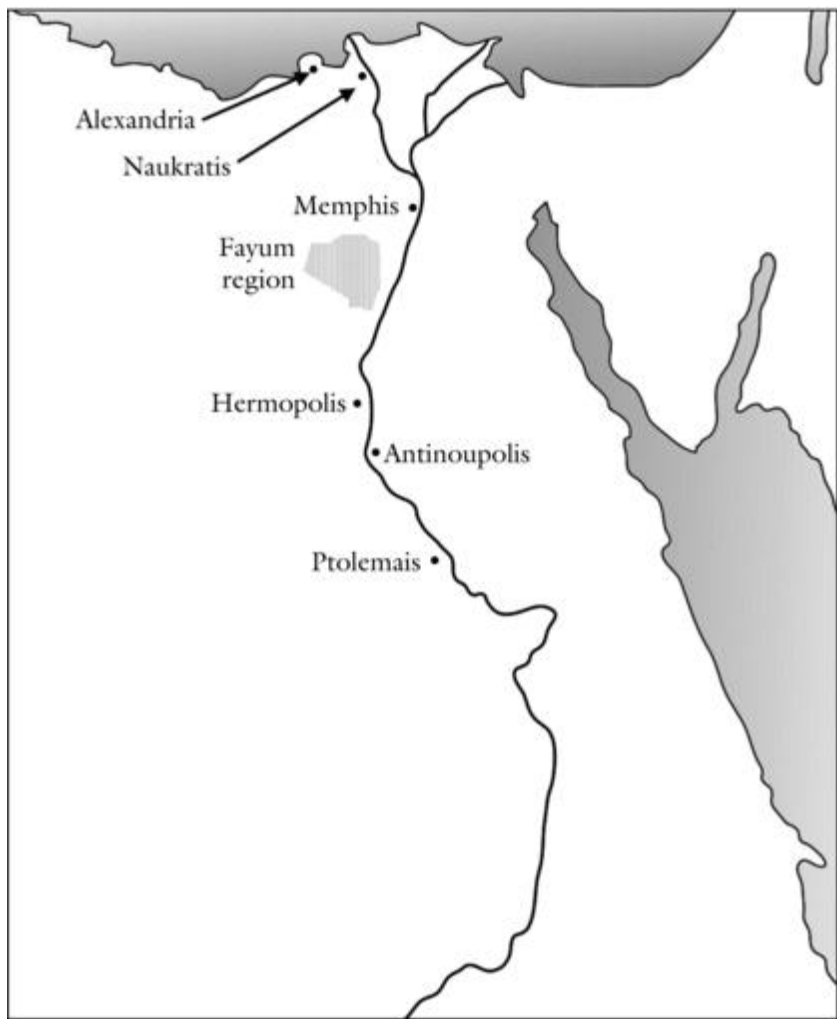
c.200 CE), when membership in a *gymnasion* became a legal requirement for elite status; and (3) the third century CE, when *metropoleis* (capitals of nomes) achieved the legal status of cities, which significantly enhanced their ability to organize athletic contests.

2 Sport in the Early Ptolemaic Kingdom

Alexander and his immediate successor as ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy I, preserved the traditional administrative division of Egypt into roughly forty districts (nomes), each with its own capital, which the Greeks called *nomoi* and *metropoleis*, respectively. The *metropoleis* were not autonomous political entities like Greek city-states (*poleis*); their inhabitants were governed directly by the royal administration. In other parts of the territories in the Near East conquered by Alexander, the rulers of newly established states such as the Seleucid Kingdom founded new or refounded old urban centers as *poleis*, which, although part of a kingdom, could theoretically act independently and which granted citizenship to their residents. In Egypt, however, the number of *poleis* remained limited to three: the old Greek trading post Naukratis, the new capital Alexandria, and Ptolemais, a new city in Upper Egypt founded by Ptolemy I (see [Map 23.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay).

Alexander's conquest marked the beginning of large-scale Greek immigration to Egypt. Ptolemy came from Macedonia, and he and his descendants employed an army largely made up of men from various parts of the Greek world. There was, therefore, particularly in the early decades of Ptolemaic rule, a steady influx into Egypt of Greeks who came to take up (well recompensed) positions in the army. Other Greeks were attracted to Egypt because of economic prospects.

Map 23.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



These Greek immigrants formed the upper layers of early Ptolemaic society. Soldiers and officers received a plot of land in the *chora*, the countryside of Egypt, so most of them settled in villages or *metropoleis* and not in one of the three *poleis*. To enjoy privileges such as tax reduction or exemption, they had to identify themselves as Greeks. These villages and *metropoleis* were not legally capable of granting citizenship to their residents, and so Greek immigrants were identified by reference to the *polis* from which they or their forefathers had emigrated. These designations, called *ethnika*, were used as identifiers for more than two centuries, and individuals whose families had resided in Egypt for generations continued to use *ethnika* inherited from their ancestors (La'da 2002).

That *metropoleis* were not *poleis* hindered the introduction of sport. The procedure for the introduction of an *agon* in Greek *poleis* outside of Egypt during the Hellenistic period (323–31 BCE) is known from

inscriptions (e.g., *IvM* 16, *FD* 3.3 215). The city council decided to establish the contest and determined practicalities, such as date, age categories, procedures for the appointment of officials, and so on. It then sent out ambassadors to other communities to publicly announce its intention to hold *agones* on a particular date and to invite participation by athletes, who would compete in the games, and by official delegations from other communities, which would attend the religious ceremonies that were held during the games. Even if the initiative for a new contest might come from a Hellenistic king, the practical organization was still in the hands of the city. During the festival, the city expressed its central importance with the special place civic groups such as magistrates, priests, and ephebes received in the procession.

While the *poleis* of Egypt could have *agones* like any other Greek city, the Egyptian *metropoleis* lacked the institutional apparatus for the organization and upkeep of their own games. This had the effect of impeding the creation of local *agones* in Ptolemaic Egypt.

Nonetheless, sport flourished in Ptolemaic Egypt, in large part because the first four Ptolemaic kings (Ptolemy I–IV) actively sought to promote participation in the major athletic contests in the Greek homeland by Greeks residents in Egypt and founded contests in Alexandria. In these, as in other respects, they followed the example of their Macedonian predecessors. Philip won several equestrian events at Olympia, and Alexander organized many games during his expedition (see Chapter 22 in this volume).

A recently discovered collection of epigrams shows that in the Early Hellenistic period members of the Ptolemaic court were particularly active in equestrian competitions at major games at sites in the Greek homeland such as Olympia and Delphi. A papyrus roll, which was discarded and reused as mummy cartonnage, contains 112 epigrams that were written by Posidippos of Pella, a poet who was active in the first half of the third century BCE and who spent much of his life at the courts of Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II. Most of these epigrams were unknown to modern-day scholars before the publication of the papyrus in 2001. One section of the collection comprises 18 poems, called *hippika*, that celebrate victories in equestrian contests, and these poems added substantially to our knowledge of the sporting ambitions of members of the Ptolemaic court. Posidippos's *hippika*, like a previously known victory ode for Queen Berenike II written by the poet Callimachus, were commissioned to promote the Ptolemaic penchant for victory. The investment in racehorses and in publicity for the victories served a clear goal: the promotion of an "image of power" in the Greek world.¹

Members of the royal family did not participate personally in

athletic events, possibly because Alexander, whom they took as their model, reputedly found these events too lowly for a king (Plutarch *Alexander* 4.10), but no doubt mainly because they did not have the talent. In ancient Greek equestrian competitions, it was typically the case that chariots were driven and horses were ridden by hirelings, while virtually all the fruits of victory accrued to the horses' owners (see Nicholson 2005 for further discussion). The Ptolemies did, however, stimulate their subjects to compete, again in order to demonstrate the strength of Egypt. Polybius (5.64.4–7) reports that Ptolemy IV (ruled 221–205 BCE) showed great esteem for Polykrates, who immigrated to Egypt from the *polis* of Argos and took up an important post in the Ptolemaic army. Ptolemy was impressed by Polykrates' noble lineage and wealth and especially by the reputation of his father Mnasiadas, who was a famous athlete. Ptolemy went so far as to appoint Mnasiadas eponymous priest of Alexander, the highest honorary official in Alexandria (Clarysse and van der Veken 1983: 14). In another passage (27.9), Polybius tells how Ptolemy IV subsidized the training of a talented boxer in order to send him to Greece to compete in high-level athletic contests. Against this background, it is not surprising that competitors from Egypt did remarkably well in major athletic competitions in Greece in the third century BCE (Remijsen 2009). Unlike competitors from new Greek cities in Asia, Alexandrians (the only identifiable inhabitants of Egypt) are clearly present in lists of athletes who won victories at the major Greek athletic festivals in the third century BCE.

The Ptolemies, particularly Ptolemy II (ruled 283–246 BCE), also founded *agones* in Egypt. The Ptolemaia, a quadrennial religious festival that included athletic contests, was established in 279 by Ptolemy II in honor of his deceased father. It was held every four years in a sacred place called Hierakonchos not far from Alexandria (*PSI* 4.364).² Ptolemy had high ambitions for the athletic contests at the Ptolemaia; he wanted them to become equal to the Olympic Games and for this purpose coined the term “isolympic,” a word that outlived the Ptolemaia for many centuries. To obtain this special status, he adapted the traditional custom of sending out representatives to other cities to announce the intent to hold an *agon*. Ptolemies' representatives did something new by requesting that the cities they visited grant victors in the Ptolemaia the same rewards as victors in the Olympics (*Syll.* 3 390, *CID* 4.40).

This innovation inspired the development of a procedure for elevating the status of athletic contests, a procedure that was subsequently employed by the organizers of contests other than those of the Ptolemaia. It will be helpful to briefly review here the relevant terminology, which will be employed in this essay (on the procedures

and terminology, also see Chapter 6). Starting in the sixth century BCE, the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games became the four most prestigious contests in the Greek world. In literary works of the fourth century, these games are sometimes characterized as *stephanites* (stephanitic, “games giving a crown”), because the prizes awarded to victors at the games themselves were crowns made from sacred plants, such as the crown of olive awarded at Olympia. The communities from which those victors came habitually gave them further rewards with substantial monetary value. The prestige of the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games was such that they were the stephanitic games par excellence, though there was no particular reason that the term could not have been applied to less well known contests that also only gave crowns as prizes.

In the Hellenistic period, as many new athletic contests were founded in the rapidly expanding Greek world, the term “stephanitic” was also used to describe athletic contests organized in such a way that victors received from their home cities the same sort of rewards they received for winning at the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, or Nemean Games. This terminology can be confusing because some of these new games possibly offered prizes other than crowns.

In order to become stephanitic in this sense (that is as a technical categorizing term rather than as a literary description), the community responsible for organizing the athletic contest in question had to send out ambassadors to other communities in order to request that they recognize the games as stephanitic and reward victors accordingly. As a result, a set of games organized by Community A could be stephanitic as far as Community B was concerned, but not stephanitic as far as Community C was concerned.

Although the introduction of the Ptolemaia predates the new use of the term “stephanitic,” it did inspire it. When Ptolemy II persuaded many communities to recognize the Ptolemaia as isolympic, which meant that those communities rewarded any of their citizens who won a victory at the Ptolemaia in the same fashion that they would reward an Olympic victor, other cities followed his example and had their games recognized as isopythian, or isonemean. By the mid-third century, “stephanitic” came into use as an umbrella term for all these games for which victors were rewarded in their hometown. As the term “stephanitic” was applied to a much larger number of games than in the fourth century, a new word was needed to designate the “Big Four,” and, starting in the second century BCE, the cycle of these four games, which were timed to never coincide with each other, was called the *periodos* (“the circuit”).

One final linguistic nuance is worthy of brief mention. Starting in the late second century BCE the word *hieros* (“sacred”) also began to

be used to describe contests that were stephanitic, with no evident difference in meaning. For a time the words were used interchangeably (and sometimes together, which was redundant but perhaps impressive to some); eventually *hieros* became the standard term. This term too is potentially confusing because in a sense most if not all Greek athletic contests, which were typically held as part of religious festivals, were sacred. One must, therefore, bear in mind that the terms stephanitic or sacred, when applied to athletic contests founded in the Hellenistic period and later, and when used properly, are technical terms with specific meanings that are less obvious than they might appear.³

Although several states that were allied with Ptolemy accepted the Ptolemaia's isolympic status, he did not actually succeed in making the Ptolemaia into a contest that enjoyed the same reputation as the major athletic games such as the Olympics. The Ptolemaia are only attested in the third century BCE, and the level of competition was not very high. A professional actor from the minor state of Tegea even managed to win the boxing competition (*Syll.*³ 1080). Although athletes from the periphery traveled to the Greek mainland to compete at sites such as Olympia, the reverse did not occur with any frequency in the third century. The cosmopolitan athlete, who traveled throughout the Greek world to participate in contests, only became common in the first century BCE.

Less than 10 years after founding the Ptolemaia, Ptolemy II, having married his sister Arsinoë and deified himself and his wife as the Sibling Gods, established another agonistic festival, this one called the Theadelpheia. Ambassadors from other cities made a single trip for the Ptolemaia and the Theadelpheia, which suggests that the contest of the Theadelpheia was quadrennial as well. Like the Ptolemaia, the Theadelpheia probably attracted mostly local athletes, alongside some visitors from cities allied with the Ptolemies (*SEG* 36.1218; *IvO* 188).

A third important contest was the Basileia. These games were probably not a direct continuation of the ad hoc games Alexander dedicated to Zeus Basileus in Memphis (Arrian *Anabasis* 3.5.2), but may have been inspired by those games. Details of the organization of the Basileia suggest that they were introduced after the Ptolemaia. The contest was held on the eighteenth day of the Egyptian month of Dystros, which was Ptolemy II's birthday and also the day on which, at age 24, he became co-ruler of Egypt. The birthday was of course an annual event, but it is not clear whether it was celebrated annually with an *agon*.

There has been some confusion as to whether there was a single Basileia festival held in Alexandria or whether the festival was celebrated in multiple places in Egypt on the same day. An inscription

found in Athens (*IG II²* 3779) locates the games in Alexandria, but an inscription listing the victors in an iteration of the Basileia held in 267 BCE (*SEG* 27.1114) was found in the Fayum region, about 100 kilometers south of Alexandria. Therefore, it is often assumed that Basileia were held at several places in Egypt, with the main Basileia in Alexandria and local versions in the *chora* (e.g., Koenen 1977: 29–32; Nerwinski 1981: 118), but this is contrary to all other evidence for athletic contests and to logic. The field of potential competitors in Egypt was too small for multiple competitions to be feasible. For the games of 267, the inscription lists four victors from Macedonia, six from Thrace, one from Thessaly, one from Samos, one from Halicarnassos, one from Boeotia, one from Taras, and one from Naukratis. Since the victor list inscription is damaged, the names of another twenty victors (among them the artists) are missing. Some of the athletes can be identified with persons known from papyri, which shows that most, if not all, were living in Egypt and that they are identified in the victor list using their *ethnika*.⁴ The only known competitor from outside of Egypt was an Athenian artist (*IG II²* 3779). The inscribed victor list was found in the Fayum because it was erected by a local resident named Amadokos, whose three sons won victories in that iteration of the Basileia.⁵ Amadokos set up the inscription in his hometown to commemorate the achievements of his sons. The president of the contest is identified as an Alexandrian, which firmly locates the games in the capital.

One of the political subdivisions of the city of Alexandria, the deme of Eleusis, had a yearly festival with a musical and, possibly, athletic *agon* (*P.Oxy.* 26.2645 Fragment 3). A contest for artists was also held as part of the Dionysia festival in Alexandria (Theocritus *Encomium to Ptolemy Philadelphus* 112–4). The yearly feast of the Arsinoeia may have had an agonistic component as well (*PSI* 4.364).

Finally, there is the so-called Penteteris, which is often identified with the Ptolemaia. Athenaeus (196a–03b), using the work of Callixeinos of Rhodes as a source, supplies a detailed description of a procession in the reign of Ptolemy II. This procession was made up of 12 separate groupings, each of which was dedicated to a different god. Athenaeus only describes the Dionysian unit, but he mentions that the first unit was dedicated to Ptolemy I and Berenike and that the last was dedicated to Alexander. The procession belonged to a quadrennial festival with an agonistic component. Athenaeus does not name the festival, but notes that the information came from the records of the Penteterides. Therefore, the procession has been connected to four papyri dealing with supplies for a festival called Penteteris or Penteterikon, that is “the quadrennial feast,” which does not seem to be a proper name. The main arguments for identifying this Penteteris

with the Ptolemaia are that the procession seems to have been designed to communicate a dynastic message and that the Ptolemaia is the best known quadrennial festival with an agonistic component. These arguments are inconclusive, however, as most Ptolemaic contests were parts of dynastic festivals and can be assumed to have been quadrennial or to have been held in a more splendid manner every four years. The identification of the festival described by Athenaeus with the Penteteris mentioned in papyri is also uncertain, as the records of the Penteterides – plural – may have contained information on all the penteteric festivals held in Alexandria. In order to make definitive statements as to the precise identity of the festival described by Athenaeus, we will have to wait for more evidence to come to light.

The aforementioned games were all held in Alexandria. Although most or all of them were instituted at the initiative of the king, Alexandrian citizens played prominent roles in organizing, presiding over, and running the contests. In the reign of Ptolemy III, the city of Ptolemais in Upper Egypt was granted the right to establish a contest for artists. In the *metropoleis*, however, there is no evidence for recurring contests with a full slate of events. This does not, however, mean a total absence of competitions. Local festivals connected to *gymnasia* could include some agonistic elements. For example, in the village of Psinachis in the Fayum, a region with many Greek immigrants serving in the Ptolemaic army, there was a contest for horsemen during a festival of Hermes (*P.Genova* 3.197).

Thus far, I have focused on competitive sport and neglected the other form of institutionalized sport, namely sport that took place in *gymnasia*. This type of sport involved a much broader segment of the Greek population of Egypt than the limited number of very talented athletes and very wealthy horse owners who took part in high-level competitions. Many immigrants wanted to institute *gymnasia* to recreate the facility that had served as training center and social club in their hometowns. They saw *gymnasia* as a place to meet their peers, to train their sons, and to cultivate a Greek way of life in what was for them, initially at least, a foreign land.

The absence of *poleis* in the Egyptian *chora*, which impeded the spread of *agones*, did not have the same dampening effect when it came to *gymnasia*. While the foundation of a successful new *agon* was a project that required interaction with a number of other communities, the construction of a *gymnasion* was a purely local concern, and private initiative could take the place of a formal decision. *Gymnasia* and *palaistrai* are attested in the Egyptian *chora* from the third century BCE on, even in villages.⁶ They were founded by members of the Greek elite, generally people from the circle

around the king or military men. Their establishment helped foster the spread of sport in the *chora*. The ephebate (institutionalized physical training for youths) is not yet attested in the *chora* in the third and early second century BCE. Several papyri do mention *neaniskoi*, who were perhaps young officers above the age of ephebes, owning their own plots of land and training and socializing together in *gymnasia* (Habermann 2004).

3 Sport in Egypt in the Later Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods

As the Hellenistic period progressed, participation in the activities centered in *gymnasia* became part of a lifestyle that defined who belonged to the elite of the Ptolemaic Kingdom, for Greeks as well as Hellenized Egyptians. The use of *ethnika* referring to a Greek *polis* to express one's Greek identity and privileged status was gradually abandoned. While for the first immigrants maintaining a sense of Greek ethnicity had been a major factor in the attraction of the *gymnasion*, this was now to a great extent replaced by the elite character of the institution. The *gymnasia* in the Egyptian villages and *metropoleis* started to conform to *gymnasia* in the rest of the Greek world. The first gymnasiarchs and evidence for the ephebate outside of Alexandria appear in the mid-second century BCE (SB 3.6159), but the organization of this early ephebate is not well known (Legras 1999: 133–42).

Under Roman rule, which began in 30 BCE, the elite in the *chora* evolved into what was called the gymnasial order (*oi apo tou gymnasiou*). This evolution confirms the importance of *gymnasia* as markers of an elite lifestyle. All 13-year-old boys aspiring to become ephebes had to demonstrate that their forefathers were *gymnasion* members in 4/5 CE. Originally, all freeborn sons of a father who was a member of the gymnasial order inherited this status, and the concomitant privileges, but in the third quarter of the first century CE the rules were tightened and, to be admitted to the gymnasial order, boys had to prove the gymnasial status of their maternal grandfather as well. Their applications for enrollment are well attested on papyrus (Legras 1999: 169–79; van Minnen 2002: 344–7). The main officials involved in the *gymnasion* administration – the gymnasiarch, the *kosmetes*, and the *exegetes* – were local magistrates, appointed by the

Roman authorities from the local elite (Lewis 1983; Legras 1999: 181–7). In the administration of their *gymnasia*, the *metropoleis* therefore differed little from the more independent *poleis*, certainly by the second century CE.

Throughout the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods Alexandria remained the only place in Egypt with real *agones*. In the chora, local competitions for the young are attested from the second century BCE, for example torch races (*BGU* 4.1256), and athletes could also perform as a side event at various local festivals (e.g., *P.Oxy.* 3.519), but there is no evidence recurring contests with a full program of athletic events, competitors from outside the community, and prizes offered by an appointed *agonothetes* (contest organizer).

Even for the contests in the capital, there is little or no evidence for the second and first centuries BCE. It seems that when the third-century prosperity of the Ptolemies declined, some of the Alexandrian games disappeared. In the first and second centuries CE, when there was a notable increase of contests all across the eastern half of the Roman Empire (see Chapter 24), evidence for contests in Alexandria again appears in considerable quantities.

One contest held in Alexandria that appears for the first time during this period is the Seleukeios *agon*. This contest is attested in two inscriptions from the era of Roman rule, one not precisely dated and one from the early third century CE (Moretti 1953: no. 847), though it may have been founded as early as the Hellenistic period. The Seleukeios *agon* was presumably organized by the Alexandrian deme of that name, and is in that way similar to the Dionysia organized by the Alexandrian deme of Eleusis.⁸ In the middle of the first century CE, Tiberius Claudius Patrobios from Antioch won the *pentaeterikos* in Alexandria, as did two other athletes soon thereafter (Moretti 1953: nos. 65, 67, 68). This name has nothing to do with the Penteteris from the third century BCE. The adjective *pentaeterikos* occurs repeatedly in inscriptions, not only to describe the games in Alexandria, but also for games elsewhere. In the first and early second centuries CE, many cities had only one contest, usually without a famous name, so for champions it was not important to list the exact names of all contests; the name of the city said enough. Only in the middle of the second century, when several cities organized more than one contest, did it become common to mention all games by their proper name. Although it is impossible to be certain, the contest in which Tiberius Claudius Patrobios took part may have been the Seleukeios *agon*, as all other Alexandrian contests known by name from second or third-century inscriptions certainly did not yet exist at the time of Patrobios.

There is evidence from the first and second centuries CE for other

contests at Alexandria, namely a biannual *Sebasteios agon* (Moretti 1953: no. 84) and annual ephebic games (*P.Lond.* 6.1912). In the reign of Hadrian (117–38 CE), the Hadrianeia was established, which was subsequently renamed the Hadrianeios Philadelphaios *agon* (Moretti 1953: no. 84). In 175/6, a festival called the Olympia was founded (Strasser 2004/5: 443).

As in the Ptolemaic period, not all these games were held in the city center. Just east of Alexandria, Octavian founded Nikopolis, a Roman military camp and small town with a stadium, theater, and racetrack for horses, where some of the Alexandrian *agones* took place (Strabo 17.1.10). In the city center, games took place in the stadium-hippodrome called the Lageion (e.g., *SB* 3.6220; cf. Remijsen 2010: 199).

When his favorite Antinoos drowned in the Nile in 130 CE, Hadrian founded a new *polis* at the spot, Antinoupolis. Upon its foundation, this city was granted the right to build a circus and to hold games, the Megala Antinoeia, that were sacred (in the technical sense of the term) (Decker 1973). The construction of a circus rather than a stadium was normal in regions with a limited tradition of stadia, such as Egypt or Syria (Humphrey 1986: 438–520). A circus could be used for both athletic and equestrian contests, and it had, moreover, more of the grandeur expected of an imperial donation. The Megala Antinoeia were annual, which was uncommon for *agones* with full programs, but typical of ephebic games (*I.Portes* 9; *PSI* 3.199). This shows that the competition for ephebes was the most important part of the games. Apparently a full program for adults and boys was added to the ephebic games, that is the Antinoeia proper, thus making them Megala.

With only four new contests (three in Alexandria and one in Antinoupolis), Egypt did not really participate in the general upsurge of contests in the eastern half of the Roman Empire in the first and second centuries CE, because most of its cities were still unable to found their own games. The athletes of Egypt, on the other hand, could profit from the international agonistic explosion. Alexandrians won a third of all Olympic *stadion* races in the first two centuries CE (i.e., in 16 out of 50 Olympiads). This overrepresentation of the city should be linked to the disappearance of *ethnika* (Remijsen 2009): all Egyptians now competed as Alexandrians. A good example is Marcus Aurelius Asklepiades, a well-known inhabitant of Hermopolis, who identified Alexandria as his hometown (*IGUR* 1.240).

4 Changes in Administration and Sport in Egypt in the Third Century CE

When the emperor Septimius Severus granted the status of *polis* and the right to form city councils to the Egyptian *metropoleis* around 200 CE (Bowman 1971: 3–7, 11–19), *gymnasion* culture continued unchanged. Even after 212, when all free men in Egypt were given Roman citizenship, the gymnasial class continued to exist, as it represented a lifestyle that set the elite apart from the rest of the population. It was only in the fourth century that Egyptian *gymnasia* disappeared.

What did change in 200 was that the *metropoleis* could now finally take the initiative to establish games. Athletes from Egypt, moreover, were finally able to present themselves as citizens of their hometowns. By this time all areas in which Greek sport was practiced had long been incorporated into the Roman Empire, and, for the new Egyptian *poleis*, *agones* became a way to fit in within that great empire, as equals of the cities in other provinces, and to establish relations with those cities. Because it was necessary to apply to the emperor for permission to establish games or have them recognized as sacred, the introduction or reorganization of games was also a way to interact with the emperor and to express loyalty (e.g., Wörrle 1988: 4–17).

The first new Egyptian *polis* to have games was Hermopolis. This *metropolis* was located directly across the Nile River from Antinoupolis, which, as we have seen, had regularly held sacred games, the Megala Antinoeia, since its foundation in 130 CE. Officials of the local *gymnasion* had organized horse races shortly before *polis* status had been granted (*P.Ryl.* 2.86). Some of Hermopolis's inhabitants, such as the aforementioned Marcus Aurelius Asklepiades, competed at the highest level athletic contests in the Greek world. Both he and his father were moreover presidents of the international athletic association, headquartered in Rome, which gave them considerable influence in the agonistic circuit. The people of Hermopolis were, therefore, in all probability eager to enter the agonistic circuit. It comes as no surprise then that before the death of Septimius Severus in 211, Hermopolis had succeeded in founding its own *agon*, called the Capitolia (*IK Side* 130).

In 200 the *metropolis* of Oxyrhynchus proposed to establish annual ephebic games, which were held for the first time in 210 and became sacred about ten years later (*P.Oxy.* 4.705; *SB* 10.10493). In 220

Leontopolis received sacred ephebic games as well (*SEG* 40.1568). Both contests were modeled after the Antinoeia and hence were called *isantinoeios*. It was uncommon that ephebic games were made sacred. This peculiarity can be explained by the precedent of the Megala Antinoeia, which were at the same time a sacred *agon* for professionals and games for ephebes. The *isantinoeios* contests were only for ephebes, but were granted sacred status just like their model.

A second wave of *agones* was founded by Egyptian *metropoleis* in the second half of the third century. Panopolis got the Paneia in 264 (*P.Oxy.* 27.2476; Van Rengen 1971; Strasser 2004/5: 465–8). Antinoupolis and Oxyrhynchus both got Capitolia, in 268 and 273, respectively (*P.Oxy.* 47.3367; *BGU* 4.1074). Lykopolis probably had games as well by this time, though their name is not known.⁹ The rapid succession of new foundations shows the competition between the cities. Each city wanted to do at least as well as the others.

By the late third century, the Egyptian contests formed a local circuit within the larger international scene. The catchment area of these games was relatively small; most competitors came from Egypt itself, as is apparent from a list of participants in the running contests of Hermopolis or Antinoupolis (*P.Ryl.* 2.93). The same impression is conveyed by third-century papyri that contain requests to the city council of Hermopolis for payment of pensions to victors (*SPP* 5.54–6, 69–70, 74); in these documents we meet a considerable number of competitors, but most of them were not international stars. The increase of local opportunities enabled local athletes to participate in contests in Egypt and nearby Syria.

There is still some evidence for the contests, athletic officials, and the ephebate in the early fourth century (e.g., *P.Oxy.* 1.42; 60.4079), but by the middle of the fourth century, the passion for sport seems to have declined noticeably in the *chora*. Contests may have survived until the end of the century only in Alexandria (Libanius *Epistles* 843, 1183; Isidorus Pelusiota *Epistles* 1470, 1651, 1671).

5 Conclusion

Throughout this essay I have made a distinction between competitive sport and *gymnasion* culture, which spread in different ways in Hellenistic Egypt. *Agones*, in the meaning of permanent, full-program contests with a regional or international catchment area, were always a status symbol, established as the result of a decision by a king or city wishing to manifest itself on the international scene. The first Ptolemies, Ptolemy II in particular, actively promoted competitive

athletics. Alexandrian games with an unmistakable dynastic touch were founded one after the other, and competitors from Egypt, among them the royals themselves, achieved impressive results at the top games in Greece. Athletic contests did not spread beyond Alexandria, though, nor could other cities send out competitors in their own name. For five centuries, the specific organization of the *metropoleis* hindered the spread of sport in the *chora*.

When the royal investments dried up in the late third century BCE, Egypt's place on the agonistic circuit became minimal for the rest of the Hellenistic period. In the first and second centuries CE, the general increase in the number of athletic contests, evident throughout the eastern half of the Roman Empire, was observable in Egypt as well, with new games in Alexandria and Antinoupolis. However, in comparison to Asia Minor or Syria, the administrative organization of the *metropoleis* still handicapped Egypt. All of this changed with the grant of *polis* status to the *metropoleis* in about 200 CE. In the third century CE, many of the new *poleis* established games and applied to the emperor for permission to make those games sacred. But it was not just because cities finally could establish games that they did this so eagerly. As in the Ptolemaic period, a contest was a status symbol, a way of showing the rest of the world that a city was just as important and autonomous as the other cities in the Empire.

Gymnasion culture spread in Egypt from the third century BCE on. In the beginning, its development was slower than that of the *agones*, as *gymnasia* were founded on private initiative and did not have a prominent role in the Ptolemaic policy. The royal sports policy was aimed more at presenting the kingdom to the outside world as Greek and powerful, than at stimulating the inhabitants to practice the Greek way of life. Egypt's particular organization did not hinder the emerging *gymnasion* culture, however, although it explains why only in Egypt were there *gymnasia* in villages as well as towns. While the *agones* declined when royal involvement decreased, sport became deeply rooted in the lifestyle of the Ptolemaic elite through the gradual introduction of the ephebate in the second century BCE. The elite character of the *gymnasion*, one of its most alluring aspects, was responsible for its continuing popularity. Under the Romans, this characteristic was even formalized when membership of the *gymnasion* became the official criterion for belonging to the privileged upper class. The organization of the *gymnasion*, originally characterized by local particularities, gradually conformed to practices elsewhere. *Gymnasia* became civic institutions. In this way, they already prepared the elite in the *metropoleis* for their future role in the *polis*.

ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations of papyrus editions (*BGU*, *P.Genova* , *P.Lond.*, *P.Oxy.*, *PSI*, *P.Ryl.*, *SB*, *SPP*) are explained in the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*. See <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>.

Abbreviations of editions of inscriptions:

CID = *Corpus des inscriptions de Delphes*

FD 3 = *Fouilles de Delphes III Épigraphie*

IG II² = *Inscriptiones Graecae II et III* (2nd edition)

IGUR = *Inscriptiones graecae urbis Romae*

IK Side = *Side im Altertum. Geschichte und Zeugnisse*

I.Portes = *Les Portes du désert. Recueil des inscriptions grecques d'Antinoöpolis, Tentyris, Koptos, Apollonopolis Parva et Apollonopolis Magna*

IvO = *Die Inschriften von Olympia*

IvM = *Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander*

PSI = *Papiri greci e latini. Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana per la ricerca dei Papiri greci e latini in Egitto*

SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

Syll.³ = *Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum* (3rd edition)

NOTES

¹ For a brief introduction to Posidippos's *hippika*, see Golden 2008: 19–23. For more detailed considerations of the contents of the Posidippos papyrus, see the essays collected in Gutzwiller 2005, especially those by Fantuzzi (from whom I borrow the term “image of power”) and Thompson. For detailed discussion of what the Posidippos poems can tell us about sport in the Early Ptolemaic Kingdom, see Remijsen 2009. For instance, these poems, in conjunction with other source material, make it evident that members of the Ptolemaic court won 30 to 50 percent of the Olympic four-horse chariot races in the first half of the third century.

² The identification of the Ptolemaia in Alexandria with the Ptolemaia in Hierá Nesos (previously regarded as a local contest in the Fayum), proposed in Remijsen 2009: 259 based on the location of another Hierá Nesos and a hippodrome just east of Alexandria, is now confirmed by the discovery of an extra piece of a letter of Ptolemy III to the city of Kos (*SEG* 53.855 l. 18–19).

³ On all of this terminology, see Remijsen 2011.

⁴ The victors listed in the inscription, and presumably most of the

athletes competing at the Basileia, belonged to the upper strata of Ptolemaic society. The Thessalian Kineas, for example, was eponymous priest of Alexander in 263–2 BCE.

5 As Ebert (1979: 5–6) noted, Amadokos was not a contest organizer and had no official connection to the Basileia.

6 This stands in contrast to the situation in much of the rest of the Greek world, where *gymnasia* were strongly associated with urban centers. On the difference between *gymnasia* and *palaistrai*, see Chapter 19.

7 The other text is a fragmentary and still unpublished inscription from Delphi, cf. Robert 1948: 25.

8 The contest was not named directly after Seleukos (naming a contest after a rival king would be unique) but after the Alexandrian deme, which was named after Seleukos when he was still Ptolemy's ally (Clarysse and Swinnen 1983: 14).

9 *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 27.2476 (288 CE) mentions two officials of the artistic association, an Alexandrian and a man from Antinoupolis, with citizenship of Lykopolis. Such multiple citizenships result from victories in local contests.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

On sport in Egypt before Alexander’s conquest, see Decker 2006. For relatively brief overviews of the history of the Ptolemaic period in Egypt see Hölbl 2001 or Manning 2010.

Perpillou-Thomas collected the evidence for festivals in Greco-Roman Egypt (1993) and listed all artists and athletes known from Greek-language papyri (1995). Together with Criscuolo’s brief discussion of the Alexandrian contests (1995), these works offer a good starting point for sport in Egypt.

For the Ptolemaic period, more detailed studies have mostly focused on the Ptolemaia and in particular on its possible identification with the procession described by Callixeinos (e.g., Nerwinski 1981; Rice 1983), on Egyptian participation in the major Panhellenic athletic festivals (e.g., Bennett 2005 and Decker 2008), and more recently on the epigrams of Posidippos (e.g., van Bremen 2007 and Remijsen 2009).

Kah and Scholz 2004 is a recent collection of essays on the Hellenistic *gymnasion*. On the ephebate in Egypt, see Legras 1999.

For the Roman period, the most interesting papyri have been collected in Frisch 1986. The best discussion of the contests in the Egyptian *chora* is Strasser 2004/5. The forthcoming volume of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri (*P.Oxy.* 79) will publish several new papyri on Imperial age games in Egypt.

CHAPTER 24

Sport in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor

H. W. Pleket

1 Introduction

While the study of Greek sport traditionally concentrates on mainland Greece in the Archaic (700–480 BCE)¹ and Classical (480–323) periods, this *Companion* shows that the sporting world of the Greeks was much broader in both geographical and chronological scope (e.g., see essays on the Greek West, Chapter 13; Hellenistic Egypt, Chapter 23; and Constantinople, Chapter 43; see also Scanlon 2009). This essay surveys the contribution of communities in Asia Minor (defined roughly as the territory of present day Turkey) to the spread and longevity of Greek sport in the Hellenistic (323–31) and Roman (31 BCE–476 CE) periods by focusing on three themes.

First, we will explore the remarkable growth of the “agonistic market” (the totality of athletic contests held in any given period). The evidence pertaining to Greek sport in Asia Minor prior to the fourth century is meager and often incidental. In the course of the Hellenistic period, Greek civilization, urbanization, and sport steadily expanded eastward from the coastal areas to the rest of Asia Minor, and this process continued and in some ways intensified during the early centuries of Roman rule. There is a concomitant increase in the number of extant documents, most notably inscriptions, concerning athletes, festivals, and facilities. Those documents, when carefully collected and properly analyzed, make it possible to study sport in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor in considerable detail.² Conspicuous among the concerns of cities in Asia Minor, both those inhabited largely by Greeks and those inhabited by non-Greeks who

were adopting some elements of Greek culture (i.e., Hellenizing), was the foundation of athletic contests. There was, as a result, an ongoing expansion of the agonistic market in Asia Minor between the fourth century BCE and the third century CE.

The sports activity that took place in the cities in Asia Minor went far beyond athletic contests and included the construction and maintenance of a “sports culture” that encouraged regular training in local *gymnasias* and valorized athletic success at all levels of competition. What this sports culture meant for cities and for the relationship between urban elites, civic life, and identity on the one hand and sport on the other is the second theme of this essay.

As long as they paid taxes and maintained law and order, the cities of Asia Minor were largely allowed to manage their own athletic matters during both the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Urban autonomy in agonistic matters, however, did not mean that Roman emperors and their representatives in the provinces played no role in the development of agonistic life. Our third theme, then, is the role of Roman emperors in the operation of Greek sport. The generally attentive and positive involvement of Roman emperors in athletic festivals and rewards for victors may come as a surprise to some readers.

2 The Growth of the “Agonistic Market”

The story of sport in Asia Minor stretches back long before the beginning of the Hellenistic period, but we are largely ignorant about athletic activities in Greek communities in Asia Minor in the Archaic and Classical periods. In the lists of Olympic victors, athletes from Asia Minor are rare until well into the fourth century.

An isolated anecdote related by Herodotus (1.144) about a certain Agasikles from Halicarnassos is amusing but not very helpful. At some point in the Archaic period, a festival was celebrated on the Knidian peninsula in southwestern Asia Minor (see [Map 24.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay) in honor of Apollo. Victors received bronze tripods, which they were supposed to dedicate in the temple. When a certain Agasikles was greedy and took his tripod back home, his city was punished for it. The story recalls other contemporary contests in mainland Greece, with bronze tripods or cauldrons as prizes for the winners. In the case of Agasikles we probably have a local contest. We have no idea whatsoever how many

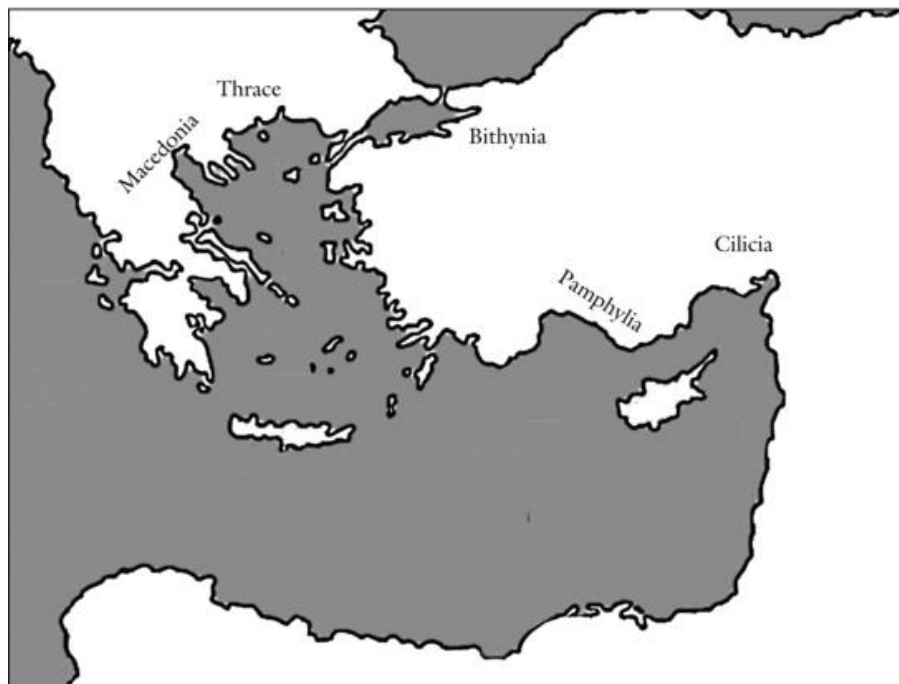
such contests existed in Archaic Asia Minor.

The extant evidence points to an upward shift in athletic activity in Asia Minor in the latter decades of the fourth century. It is not until the later fourth century that honorary decrees from Asia Minor make mention of the privilege of *proedria* (special seating at public events) at “all the contests celebrated in the city.” The wording of these decrees, attested first at Ilion and Iasos, points to the existence of contests, including athletic contests, of some importance in these communities. A decree of c.300 from Ilion records that an honorand received *proedria* at a festival, the Panathenaia, celebrated there (Frisch 1975: nos. 1, 24; *SEG* 53.1373; Knoepfler 2010). An inscription of roughly the same date from Ephesos shows that a young athlete had crossed the Aegean and won as a boy in the Nemean Games (Robert 1969–90: vol. 5: 354–72; Brunet 2003). This implies that he had already been successful in the local *gymnasion* and in lesser contests organized in the city or region. Similarly it is in the fourth century that athletes from Asia Minor appear in the list of Olympic victors, albeit in relatively small numbers.

Map 24.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



Map 24.2 Key regions mentioned in this essay.



In the third century, cities in Asia Minor apparently wanted to compete with the great games of mainland Greece. Kos, an independent *polis* (city-state) in the Hellenistic period, but in the Roman period part of the province of Asia, set the trend. In 242/1 the city decided to dispatch *theoroi* (ambassadors) all over the Greek world (from Naples in southern Italy to the regions of Thrace and Macedonia in northern Greece, see [Map 24.2](#)) requesting dozens of cities (and a few monarchs) to recognize their local, preexisting athletic contest held as part of the Asklepieia festival as a “stephanitic *agon*” (crown game). In the Archaic and Classical periods, Greeks used the phrase “stephanitic *agon*” to refer to athletic contests that awarded only wreaths as prizes, which in practice meant primarily the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games. Starting in the third century this terminology was used to refer to any set of athletic contests organized such that victors received much the same privileges as victors in the original crown games.³ In order to become a stephanitic *agon*, a contest’s organizers had to ask that other communities add it to the list of such games recognized by the community in question. Within the broad category of crown games, cities could decide to give isolympic (“equal to the Olympic Games”) or isopythian (“equal to the Pythian Games”) status to them. This entailed special, and probably higher, rewards for the victors. The privileges possibly consisted of free meals in the town hall, an honorary position in processions, and special portions of meat during

sacrifices (see Chapter 23 for further discussion).

The Koan *theoroi* seem to have asked the inhabitants of other cities to join in the sacrifices and contests at the Koan Asklepieia and to keep to a truce during the festival.⁴ They did not officially ask for recognition of their local athletic contest as a stephanitic *agon*, but from the answers of three cities (Philippi, Pella, and Gela) we may infer that the Koan request was, at least by those three, interpreted as such. The gifts that the cities decided to give to the Koan *theoroi* were to be the same as those given to the *theoroi* who announced “the stephanitic games, the Pythian or Olympic Games” (*IG* XII 4 220–1, 223).⁵

The citizens of Magnesia-on-Maeander followed suit. In 222/1 they proposed to raise the status of the athletic contest held as part of the Leukophryena (a festival celebrated at Magnesia in honor of Artemis Leukophryene) to that of a crown game. The overture was rebuffed, but in 208 they tried again. They sent ambassadors “to the kings and the other Greeks,” many of whom agreed to recognize the Leukophryena not only as a crown game, but also as an isopythian contest.⁶

In roughly the same period (218/7–206/5) the inhabitants of Miletos sent out *theoroi* with a request to “kings, cities, and tribes [*ethne*]” to recognize their Didymeia, celebrated in honor of their patron deity Apollo Didymaios, as a crown game, and to award the highest possible privileges [*timai*] to the winners (*IG* XII 4 153; Thonemann 2007).

In the third and second centuries athletic contests proliferated in Asia Minor. Louis and Jeanne Robert list 13 separate crown games spread between Asia Minor and on two islands, Samos and Kos, off the coast (Robert and Robert 1989: 20; cf. Parker 2004). An honorary decree from Kolophon dated to c.180–160 records the gift of portions of sacrificial meat to “those who have won in crown games” (*SEG* 56.1227, ll. 24–5). In a somewhat later decree from the same city a young athlete is praised for having been victorious at crown games (*SEG* 39.1243, col. I; cf. 1244, col. I app. cr. ad l. 1). After the end of his athletic career, this athlete was sent as *theoros* to Smyrna and “joined in the traditional sacrifices together with a colleague *theoros*.” In other words, Kolophon had recognized a contest at Smyrna as a crown game. Sometime in the second century the citizens of Kyzikos sought to raise the status of their local Soteria, celebrated in honor of the goddess Kore, to that of a crown game and sent out *theoroi* to that end. Delos and Rhodes are known to have reacted positively, and it is a reasonable assumption that other cities did the same (Robert 1987: 156–62). It is also noteworthy that from the third century onward a substantial fraction of Olympic victors came from communities in Asia

Minor (van Nijf 1999: 177–9).

Coins and inscriptions reveal that an astounding number of athletic contests were held in an increasingly urbanized Asia Minor during the first three centuries CE. In an often-quoted expression, Robert writes about “an athletic explosion” (1969–90: vol. 6: 712; also in König 2010: 111). Contests were established by newly founded cities and by settlements that achieved the legal status of *polis* thanks to population growth and economic prosperity. Emperor cult was also responsible for the dissemination of games. Leagues (*koina*) formed by communities in the various Roman provinces in Asia Minor founded or renamed festivals to honor emperors and in doing so created new athletic contests (Mitchell 1993: vol. 1: 219). Festivals called Kaisareia, Augousteia, Sebasta, Tiberieia, Claudieia, Vespasianeia, Traianeia, and Hadrianeia sprang up at various places in Asia Minor in the first and second centuries CE (Robert 1969–90: vol. 6: 712). Not all emperors favored the foundation of new festivals or the renaming of existing ones in their honor. Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius are not known to have given their names to contests. Under Commodus and the Severans, however, we find a throng of contests called Kommodeia, Severeia, and Anton(in)eia. In the third century CE games were often founded in regions regularly visited by imperial armies on their way to the eastern front, such as Bithynia, Cilicia, and Pamphylia (see [Map 24.2](#)). Such new games were sometimes a reward for the cities’ logistical support (Mitchell 1990: 192). On the basis of epigraphic and numismatic evidence, Wolfgang Leschhorn has concluded that during the zenith of Roman imperial rule in Asia Minor 350–400 contests are on record (Leschhorn 1998).⁷

3 Sports Culture in Greek Cities of Asia Minor

Most of the hundreds of athletic contests in Asia Minor were not high profile crown games but money games of purely local significance. Victors at money games received valuable prizes such as cash from the contest’s organizers but were not typically eligible for special rewards granted by their hometowns. These contests, called *themides*, were often quadrennial, occasionally annual. The majority of the competitors at *themides* were hometown “stars” and athletes from neighboring communities (Pleket 1998a). However, talented athletes who competed at high-level contests such as the Olympics and crown games held in Asia Minor did not neglect money games. Inscribed

victory catalogs, carved, among other places, into the stone bases of honorary statues for successful athletes, mention in great detail victories in dozens of well-known contests and frequently dryly conclude with a clause like, “and he won also in so-and-so many money games.” We can infer, based on numerous extant lists of prizes given for specific events at various contests, that the heavy events (boxing, wrestling, *pankration*) were much more popular than running and the pentathlon (Roueché 1993: 167–73).

Local athletic contests were financed from the public budget of the host city, from contributions by local magistrates presiding over the games (*agonothetai*, singular *agonothetes*), and from the revenues of endowments earmarked for the celebration of a contest in honor of the deceased donor – often a wealthy member of the city elite – or a local deity. Spectators were never charged in antiquity.

For various cities in Asia Minor, small dossiers of relevant sources have been collected and analyzed. Some dossiers allow a glimpse into the fundamental importance of sport in education and in public life in general. For the city of Termessos (located in the region of Pisidia, in south-central Anatolia), we are fortunate to have lists of names of athletic victors in games held at the two local *gymnasia*. The *gymnasion*, which constituted what I have termed elsewhere the “infrastructure of Greek athletics” (Pleket 1998a: 153–4), was the training ground for athletes, who competed first in local contests held at *gymnasia* and as part of urban festivals and subsequently, if they had sufficient talent and ambition, in higher level games. The epigraphic evidence records at least fifteen different athletic contests in Termessos. Most were celebrated in honor of deceased wealthy citizens, who in this way immortalized themselves; others were dedicated to a local deity. Lists of victors in *gymnasion* games were inscribed on the walls of public buildings. Honorific inscriptions erected for victors in local Termessian games were set up at prestigious locations in the city, not hidden in out-of-the-way places. In Onno van Nijf’s words, “the image of athletic victory could totally dominate [the] urban landscape” (1999: 191; cf. van Nijf 2000 and 2011).

Although quantitatively much less impressive, similar dossiers have been assembled for the cities of Oinoanda and Balboura in Lykia in south-central Anatolia (Strasser 2001: 118–24; Farrington 2008). Oinoanda organized at least five festivals that included athletic contests, all founded and financed by wealthy citizens: the Antipatrianeia, Demostheneia, Euaresteia, Meleagreia, and a fifth for which the name probably was derived from the names of the couple who financed it (*SEG* 44.1165–1201). That all these festivals were open only to Lykians is confirmed by the fact that all known winners

are from Lykian cities (Pleket 1998b: 129–30).

Several facts point to the immense popularity of sport in such cities. Oinoanda's Demostheneia started in 124–6 CE as a musical and cultural contest. The majority of the revenues from an endowment left by G. Iulius Demosthenes was spent on prize money for poets, musicians, and rhetors, while only 3 percent of the available money was earmarked for prizes in athletic contests, in which only citizens of Oinoanda could participate (Wörrle 1988; *SEG* 38.1462; for an English translation and discussion of the Greek inscription, see Mitchell 1990). Much later, a wealthy citizen turned this minievent into an official Pan-Lykian athletic contest, and we have two honorary inscriptions for wrestlers, but none for artists.

Oinoanda's Euaresteia were founded by a "professor of literature," Iulius Euarestos, whose brother-in-law was both a poet and a victorious wrestler and pankratiast (*SEG* 44.1165 and 1182). Euarestos, a man of culture, nevertheless established an athletic contest. After the fifth celebration he decided to add a musical contest, but the 18 honorary inscriptions found in Oinoanda and related to the Euaresteia exclusively concern athletic victors; artists are entirely absent. In spite of the cultural preferences of individual gentlemen – and of emperors like Hadrian, who approved Euarestos's initiative – sport prevailed over culture or was at least equal to it.

In the city of Balboura we have, once again, a festival called the Meleagreia, probably founded by the same Meleagros who was responsible for the contest of that name in Oinoanda (*SEG* 38.1446–8 and 1459; *SEG* 41.1343–54). The festival had a musical component and an athletic component, but the inscriptions we have are all in honor of athletic champions.

Athletic performances were a cardinal element in expressing the self-identity of urban elites in Asia Minor (Pleket 2001: 205; van Nijf 1999: 189–90). The texts from Balboura predominantly record winners (boys and men) from the civic elite. Four inscriptions from Oinoanda (*SEG* 44.1169, 1194–6) concern L. Septimius Flavianus Flavillianus, an eminent member of a very wealthy family. He started his athletic career in wrestling and *pankration* as a boy in the local Meleagreia, subsequently excelled at high-level contests in numerous other places in the Greek world, and ultimately returned to Oinoanda to win as an adult in the Meleagreia and Euaresteia (Pleket 1998b: 130–1; van Nijf 1999: 189–90). His family was exceedingly proud of his performance. A family member, Licinnia Flavilla, erected a long genealogical inscription that lists numerous family members who had served as presidents of the Lykian League, Roman senators, and even consuls. When it comes to Flavillianus, she suddenly adds a brief sentence: "He was a specialist in the *pankration* and had won in sacred

contests” (van Nijf 2001: 322).

4 Emperors and Contests

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Roman emperors and their governors allowed the cities of Asia Minor a reasonable degree of freedom to organize civic life as they saw fit. Roman authorities were interested primarily in law and order, safe roads through Asia Minor toward the “eastern front,” and timely payment of taxes. Since urban elites were ultimately responsible for the levying of taxes, Roman authorities automatically had a stake in sound financial budgets in the cities. If elites invested too much money in overly risky projects, the obligation to stand surety for the payment of the imposed taxes might not be met.

Emperors entered the playing field when cities created a new crown contest. Louis Robert is of the opinion that every new crown contest was in fact a *dorea* (*donatio*), a “gift” of the emperor. Permission was wrapped up in the much nicer ideological garment of a gift. That the gift normally implied financial support from the emperor is improbable (Robert 1969–90: vol. 6: 111; Mitchell 1990: 191). There is some evidence to show that cities continued the Hellenistic tradition of sending out *theoroi* proclaiming the new contest and asking for recognition (Robert 1987: 165–6; 1969–90: vol. 7: 754, 761, 779). When Ephesos created a new crown contest that was linked to the construction of a new temple for the emperor cult, more than thirteen cities sent *theoroi* to attend the contest and “join in the sacrifices” (Weiss 1998: 59). This implies that prior to this Ephesos itself had sent out *theoroi* to announce the festival.

Why would emperors insist on giving permission for such an operation? First, emperors realized that the creation of a new contest was an important expression of the self-identity of the Greek city. Sport was a fundamental part of Greek identity, and the foundation of an athletic contest in honor of the emperor was a way to stay Greek while simultaneously declaring and strengthening loyalty to the Roman state. There was, however, also a more pragmatic consideration: money and city budgets. Victors in crown games were lavishly rewarded by their home cities. Hellenistic-era inscriptions from Miletos and Tralleis show that *hieronikai* (victors in crown games) received cash from their mother cities (Robert 1969–90: vol. 1: 11–20; Slater 2010: 268–72). Though exact amounts of money are never mentioned, it is beyond doubt that internationally successful athletes presented a substantial burden to cities. Emperors may have

wanted to control at least the part of the urban budgets devoted to sport.

Within the general category of crown games, a special category came into existence: the so-called *eiselastic* games. A victor in an *eiselastic* game received special amounts of money after he had “entered” (*eiselaunein*) his home city. It is an attractive hypothesis that *eiselastic* awards replaced the so-called *siteresia* (payments in cash) on record for the Hellenistic period. More research is necessary on this point, especially on the problem of the nature of these allowances, often but perhaps misleadingly denoted by modern scholars as “lifelong pensions” (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 56.1359 *apparatus criticus*; Slater 2010: 268–72). Egyptian papyri show that substantial amounts of money were at stake and seem to suggest that the awards were paid as lump sums.

Apparently the *eiselastic* awards were important enough for athletes to address the emperor about the method of calculating the sums involved (Pliny *Epistles* 10.118–19; *SEG* 56.1359, ll. 10, 19, 25–6, 46, and 49–51). In a recently found letter from Alexandria Troas in northwestern Asia Minor, the emperor Hadrian (ruled 117–38 CE) altered Trajan’s earlier decision that the allowances should be payable from the moment of “*eiselastic*” entry, not from the moment of victory. Hadrian pleased the athletes with his decision that the rewards were to be due “not from the day on which someone entered his home city, but from the day the letter about the victory was delivered to their home cities. Those hurrying on to other contests were also allowed to send the letter” (Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: ll. 49–51). (For an English translation of this and two other letters on similar subjects, all written by Hadrian, see Jones 2007.)

Special permission from the emperor was necessary for transforming a crown game into an *eiselastic* contest. In the early third century CE the city of Thyateira in western Asia Minor sent the pankratiast and Olympic victor G. Perelius Aurelius Alexander to Rome to ask a favor from Caracalla, namely that the emperor allow a rise in status for the preexisting Augousteia to the rank of a “sacred *eiselastic* isopythios” contest (Robert 1937: 119–23). Forty years earlier Marcus Aurelius and Commodus gave the people of Miletos permission to raise their crown contest, the Didymeia, to the status of an *eiselastic* contest (*SEG* 38.1212). It is hard to imagine that emperors really cared about such technical niceties were it not for the serious budgetary consequences for the athletes’ home cities. Indeed, in their letters on this subject, emperors seem concerned about the financial burden of such contests (Mitchell 1990: 190).

Imperial consent was not required to found *themides*, which did not entail heavy financial burdens, but cities were nonetheless in the habit

of asking emperors for permission and authorization. In the case of the aforementioned Demostheneia in Oinoanda, the assembly asked the emperor to confirm the founder's promise to finance the contest. Hadrian did so, but he emphatically added: "He [the founder] will pay all expenses out of his own capital." Somewhat later the provincial governor was asked to confirm the decision of the assembly to introduce tax-free status for all items sold during the days of the festival. The governor agreed under the strict condition that "the city's revenues are in no way diminished." Clearly concerns about urban budgets were uppermost in the minds of authorities (Wörrle 1988: 172–82).

Why did cities voluntarily ask for imperial approval? The answer perhaps lies in the beginning of Hadrian's first letter from Alexandria Troas (see Chapter 6): sometimes magistrates could not be trusted (*SEG* 56.1359, ll. 8–13). They diverted money earmarked for contests and prizes to other purposes. No matter how essential sport and success were for the city's image, there were always people who preferred investments in buildings or the purchase of grain.

5 Conclusion

Many athletic festivals, and accordingly many athletic victors, are known from the evidence for the history of sport in Asia Minor, which adds a great deal to the broader picture of the phenomenon of Greek sport throughout the ancient Mediterranean. Inscriptions and coins provide insights into the development of a large agonistic market, important elements of the sports culture, and the role of games in relations and communications between cities and the imperial administration.

Greek games in Asia Minor thrived and continued well into Late Antiquity (e.g., at Aphrodisias, see Roueché 1993), but eventually the combination of dwindling resources, political and military instability, and Christian antipathy ended that long and illustrious tradition of sport (Roueché 2007).⁸

ABBREVIATIONS

IG = *Inscriptiones Graecae*

SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 For more discussion of the evidence and an even broader contextualization of Greek sport in Hellenistic and Roman times, see Chapter 6, where I discuss inscriptions as material evidence.
- 3 Some of the games that eventually came under the heading of crown games in fact awarded both crowns and valuable material prizes.
- 4 Keeping a truce meant allowing safe passage to athletes and spectators traveling to and from the festival.
- 5 On Hellenistic Kos and its attempt to elevate the status of its local athletic contest, see the articles collected in Höghammar 2004. For a different view see Slater 2012.
- 6 On the games at Magnesia-on-Maeander, see *SEG* 56.1231; Slater and Summa 2006; Sosin 2009; Sumi 2004; and Thonemann 2007.
- 7 Leschorn 1998 found records for some five hundred games in all with the inclusion of Macedonia, Thrace, and continental Greece.
- 8 On the persistence of chariot racing in the Byzantine Empire, see Chapter 43.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

No one monograph offers a synthetic view of sport in Asia Minor. Mitchell 1990 and 1993: vol. 1: 217–26 offer brief but excellent surveys on games in Asia Minor in general. Robert’s numerous, and important, articles on this subject are easily accessible in his *Opera Minora Selecta*. König 2010, chapters 4, 5, 7, and 8 republishes four relevant and important articles. The same applies to chapters in Scanlon (forthcoming). Relevant articles also often appear in the journal *Nikephoros*. Brunet 2003 and Roueché 1993 discuss sport in the cities of Ephesos and Aphrodisias. Much has been written about sport in Magnesia-on-Maeander; the relevant scholarship includes Slater and Summa 2006; Sosin 2009; Sumi 2004; and Thonemann 2007. On sport in Oinoanda, see Wörrle 1988.

For many cities in Asia Minor we now have corpora of inscriptions, with special sections on agonistic texts; see the series of *Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien*. Dietl forthcoming is devoted entirely to agonistic inscriptions from Pisidia in southern Turkey. For Hierokaisareia and Thyateira in Lydia, see Robert 1948a and b. Agonistic inscriptions regularly appear in *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*.

On the growth of the agonistic market in Asia Minor, particularly during the Roman era, see Leschhorn 1998. König (2005), using both literary texts and inscriptions, shows that eastern Greeks were concerned about contemporary games, about their relationship to their Greek past, and about their present situation under Roman rule. On that same subject also see Brunet 2011. On the importance of sport to local elites in Asia Minor in the first through third centuries CE, see van Nijf 1999, 2000, and 2001.

SECTION II

Rome

PART I

The Background

CHAPTER 25

Overview of Roman Spectacle

Roger Dunkle

1 Introduction

The story of the public entertainment the Romans called a spectacle (*spectaculum*, something worth seeing) begins in religious concerns. In its earliest years the primary purpose of the spectacle was to win the good will of the gods, especially in times of crisis, by providing them with good entertainment. This is not to say, however, that the human audience was not taken into consideration. The attraction that spectacles held for the Romans is evident from the steady and abundant proliferation of religious festivals requiring shows made possible by a professionalized entertainment industry.

What did the Romans (and presumably the gods) consider most worth seeing? The answer is clear: an assortment of physical contests and various kinds of dramatic presentation. The most popular spectacles included chariot races (*ludi circenses*), drama (*ludi scaenici*), gladiatorial combats (*munus*), staged animal hunts (*venatio*), staged naval battles (*naumachia*), and Greek athletic contests featuring Greek athletes (*athletae*). Although the triumphal celebration given by Julius Caesar in 46 BCE to commemorate his victory in the civil wars managed to accommodate all these events in one grand festival (Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 37–9), such spectacles were usually given alone or in various more limited combinations. This essay will review these spectacles in turn, going through them in chronological order based on their first appearance at Rome.

2 *Ludi*

Ludi seem to have originated in a vow to a divinity made by a magistrate to present games on the state's behalf, or by a general in return for victory. Once instituted, these games frequently became annual events. *Ludi* were viewed as an effective way of winning the favor of the gods and formed part of the religious calendar from the early years of the Roman Republic (c.509–31 BCE) and perhaps even earlier.

The most famous *ludi* were promised to Jupiter Optimus Maximus as an extra inducement beyond the usual sacrifices. Starting sometime around 366 BCE these games, which became known as the *ludi Romani*, were held annually in September (Balsdon 1969: 245). The main events of the festival were several days of chariot races in the Circus Maximus and dramatic performances. Two other features were a cavalry parade (*equorum probatio*) and a banquet in honor of Jupiter (*epulum Iovis*) at which the attendance of the gods (as at the chariot races and probably other events) was represented by the presence of their images (Livy 40.59.6–8; Dionysius of Halicarnassos *Roman Antiquities* 7.72.13; Ovid *Amores* 3.2.43–64).

From the late third century to the early second century BCE new annual *ludi* proliferated. The *ludi Plebeii* (Plebeian Games) were established in 220 and were celebrated each year in November. They were dedicated to Jupiter and included the same events as the *ludi Romani*. The *ludi Apollinares* (Games of Apollo) were established in 212 and, after an epidemic that struck Rome four years later, they were made an annual event with fixed dates in July (Livy 27.23.5–7). The creation of the *ludi Megalenses* (Games of the Great Mother, i.e., Kybele) was occasioned by the continuing presence of Hannibal in Italy (Livy 29.10.6). First held in 204, they immediately became an annual festival that took place in April. The last addition to the collection of regular *ludi* until the first century BCE was the *ludi Florales* (Games of Flora), a spring fertility festival that was first celebrated in 240 or 238; in 173 it was given annual status and a fixed date in late April to early May (Ovid *Fasti* 5.183–378). The *ludi Florales*, like all the other annual festivals, featured dramatic performances and chariot races (Taylor 1937: 285–6).

Ludi were steadily added to the Roman calendar. The nearly two and a half months of the year dedicated to games in the late first century BCE ballooned to a little less than six months by the middle of the fourth century CE (Veyne 1990: 399). It should also be noted that the list of annual *ludi* does not include extraordinary games given as one-time only events to celebrate special occasions. All these spectacles were financed by the state in combination with the magistrates who ran them and were provided to spectators free of charge. (For further discussion of *ludi*, see Chapter 40 in this volume.)

3 Chariot Races

Chariot races featured prominently in Roman *ludi* for centuries. The infrastructure of Roman chariot racing presents a picture of a truly professional sport in comparison with the relative amateurism of Greek chariot racing, which depended on wealthy aristocrats to provide chariots, horses, and drivers. At least by the fourth century BCE, there was in place at Rome a system of four racing factions (*factiones*) differentiated by their representative colors: white, red, blue, and green. The aristocratic owner of each faction (*dominus factionis*), in conjunction with a trusted manager (*conditor*), presided over a group of more than two hundred employees (Potter 2010: 308–25). The factions provided everything necessary for chariot races: horses, charioteers, and assistant staff like the *hortator*, an outrider who paced and encouraged a team of horses, and the *sparsor*, who cooled off the horses by sprinkling them with water. The charioteers, along with the rest of the staff, were either slaves or freedmen; in chariot racing, as in other forms of sport and spectacle, respectable Roman citizens were spectators, not participants (Edwards 1997: 67–76).

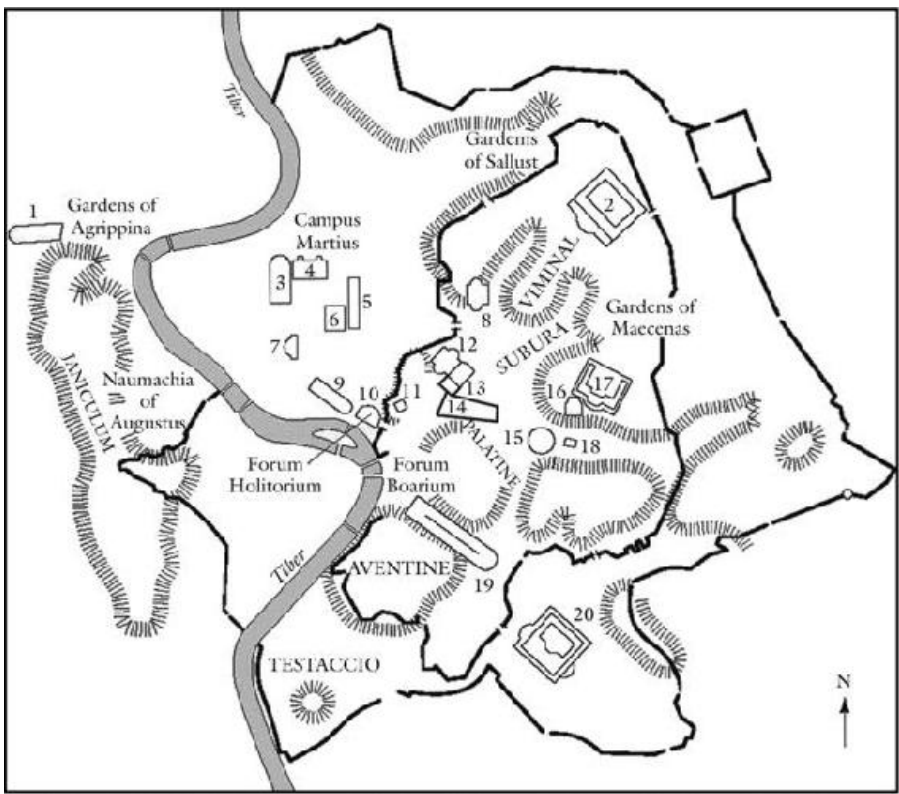
Chariot-racing fans were fiercely loyal to specific factions (Pliny *Epistles* 9.6). Fans had some attachment to individual charioteers including the great Gaius Appuleius Diocles, but drivers such as Diocles, like modern professional athletes, often switched teams (*ILS* 5287). The passionate allegiance of fans to specific factions is evident from the curses inscribed by them on lead tablets (*defixiones*), addressed to various malicious deities, asking them to cause the death of the horses and charioteers of opposing colors (Shelton 1998: 343–4; for more on *defixiones*, see Chapter 40). An oil dealer named Crescens proclaimed on his gravestone his loyalty to the Blue faction (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6.9719). (For further discussion of chariot racing, see Chapters 33 and 43.)

The primary venue for chariot racing in Rome was the Circus Maximus (see [Map 25.1](#) for its location in Rome, [Figure 25.1](#) for a reconstruction). In its final form this facility could seat approximately a hundred and fifty thousand spectators. The track at the Circus Maximus was built around a dividing barrier (*spina* or, more properly, *euripus*) decorated with objects such as obelisks, shrines, and seven “eggs” on sticks that were used to count laps. The most important function of the *euripus* was to prevent the sort of head-on collisions known to have occurred in Greek hippodromes, which lacked a dividing barrier (Sophocles *Electra* 681–756). At one end of the track, a structure containing 12 starting gates (*carceres*) was built with a slightly curved façade to minimize the disadvantage of those chariots

assigned by lot to gates at either end and hence furthest from the *euripus*. The 12 gates, which probably used the same torsion system as catapults, were opened simultaneously with the pulling of one lever. The signal to pull the lever was given by the presiding magistrate, who dropped a piece of cloth (*mappa*) from a seating box located directly above an entrance that divided the starting gates into two groups of six. Once out of the starting gates, each chariot was confined to an assigned lane until it reached the nearest end of the *euripus*, where a white line stretched across the entire track. After passing that line, the charioteers could leave their lane and begin their move toward a more advantageous position as close as possible to the *euripus*. Races were run counterclockwise and typically consisted of seven laps. The finish line was about halfway down the *euripus*, on the right side (Humphrey 1986: 85–91; for more on Roman architecture associated with spectacles, including circuses, see Chapters 37 and 38).

The 12 starting gates allowed races consisting of one, two, or three entries from each of the four factions. When each faction entered more than one team of horses in a race, things got interesting. Shelton compares this kind of race to the modern American sport of roller derby in which teams of roller skaters race around a track (1998: 343, n. 229). One team for each faction in a double entry race and two in a triple entry race were assigned the task of helping the remaining team by hindering opponents. Although four-horse teams seem to have been the standard, there were also races of chariots drawn by two, three, six, or seven horses (*ILS* 5287). Other variations involved the pairing of two factions (Reds and Greens) as a team against the other two factions (Blues and Whites) and races in which *desultores* (vaulters) jumped back and forth between two horses (Livy 23.29.5; Balsdon 1969: 323; Potter 2010: 319–20). There was a special race called a *diversium* that took place after the day's schedule was completed and seems to have been a showcase for star charioteers. In a *diversium* the winner of a race held earlier in the day would compete against an opponent he had defeated, after having exchanged horses with him (Cameron 1973: 133–4, 209).

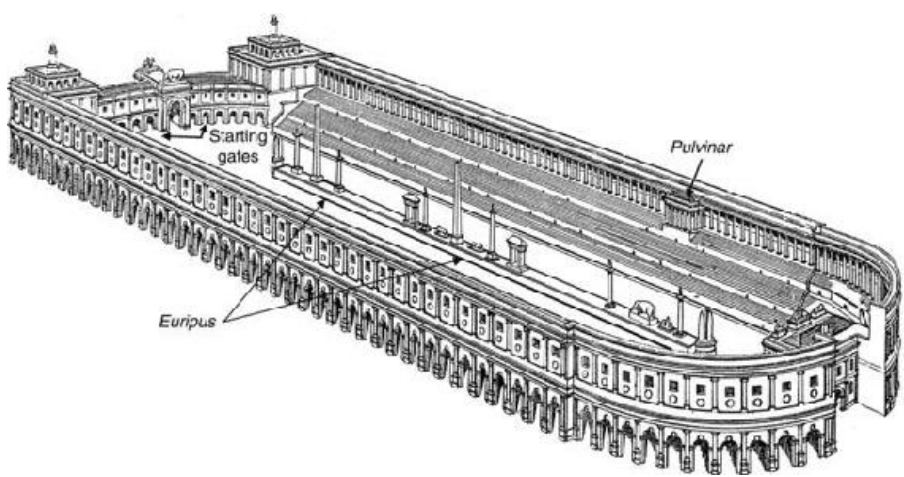
Map 25.1 Plan of ancient Rome showing major spectacle sites.



1 Circus of Gaius (Caligula) and Nero; 2 Baths of Diocletian; 3 Stadium of Domitian; 4 Baths of Nero; 5 Saepta Julia; 6 Baths of Agrippa; 7 Theater of Pompey; 8 Baths of Constantine; 9 Circus Flaminius; 10 Theater of Marcellus; 11 Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus; 12 Forum of Trajan; 13 Forums of Augustus and Caesar; 14 Forum Romanum; 15 Flavian Amphitheater (Colosseum); 16 Baths of Titus; 17 Baths of Trajan; 18 Ludus Magnus; 19 Circus Maximus; 20 Baths of Caracalla

Factions received payment for providing chariots and drivers for races and large cash prizes for winning. Prizes for victorious charioteers were both symbolic (palm and crown) and monetary. Faction owners paid their drivers a percentage of the prize money (Shelton 1998: 342–3, n. 230).

Figure 25.1 Reconstruction of the Circus Maximus in Rome. *Source:* Based on B. Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* (1921), p. 105.



4 Drama

After chariot racing, theatrical presentations (*ludi scaenici*) were the next oldest event held as part of *ludi*. The earliest *ludi scaenici* were imported from Etruria in the middle of the fourth century BCE and consisted of musical entertainments. They were later replaced by Latin adaptations of Greek tragedies and comedies, starting in 240 BCE with plays written by Livius Andronicus (Livy 7.2.1–11). At about the same time, the Atellan farce (*fabula Atellana*), which featured buffoonish country characters, became part of Roman *ludi*. Two other dramatic forms, the *fabula praetexta*, a play based on Roman history, and the *fabula togata*, a play about Romans in everyday settings, soon took their places alongside Latin adaptations and the Atellan farce. Latin adaptations and the *fabula praetexta* seem to have remained the dominant forms of dramatic entertainment at Rome until the first century BCE. At that point, Roman dramatists evidently abandoned these two forms of drama, although revivals continued to be presented well into the Imperial period (Dio Cassius 61.17.3).

One replacement was the mime (*mimus*, a word also used for actors in the mime), which rapidly grew in popularity in the second half of the first century BCE and remained a key form of Roman drama through the third century CE and beyond. Mime was a departure from more formal traditional drama and was known for the “unbridled license” of its plots (Jory 1970: 241, n. 4). The *mimus*, unlike most other forms of drama, featured both male and female performers, without masks and in bare feet, acting out scenes from everyday life. Despite the modern meaning of the word, the mime included speaking parts. Mimes were presented at a number of different festivals, but

were most closely associated with the sexually charged atmosphere of the *ludi Florales* (Valerius Maximus 2.10.8).

In the late first century BCE a new, more serious form of drama was introduced, which replaced dialogue with the interpretative dancing of a single actor. The actor, who played all the parts in the dramatic performance, was called a pantomime (*pantomimus*), and that name was eventually also used for this type of drama. The plots were for the most part derived from Greek mythology. An orchestra and chorus provided musical accompaniment. Despite their low social status and their tendency to stir up riots in the theater, pantomimes, because of their talent, consistently held places of honor in imperial circles (Cameron 1976: 223–4).

5 Gladiatorial Combats

A spectacle featuring gladiatorial combats was known as a *munus* (duty or gift). In 264 BCE the first gladiator combat at Rome was presented at the funeral of Junius Pera by his son(s) (Livy *Epitome* 16; Valerius Maximus 4.6). *Munera* retained their association with funerals throughout the rest of the Republic and beyond. The *munus*, however, eventually acquired a connection with *ludi*, when magistrates in charge began to add gladiator games to the regular events as an enhancement.

The rules of a gladiator duel were simple. A match could be won by one opponent killing the other, but this was not the only means of achieving victory. A gladiator was declared a winner if his opponent, by raising his index finger to the referee (*summa rudis*) or dropping any piece of armor on the ground, indicated that he was unwilling to continue. He was said to request *missio* (release) from the *editor*, the person in charge of the *munus* in question, which would allow him to fight another day. The *editor*, with the help of the crowd, decided whether he deserved to live or die. There was some honor in being granted *missio*, especially if the request for release came from a standing gladiator (*stans missus*) (ILS 5088). If the word *missus* was used without any qualification to describe the reception of *missio*, the assumption was that the request was made from a position kneeling, sitting, or lying on the ground, indicating that the losing gladiator had been beaten so badly that he was unable to stand. A gladiator who had acquitted himself well would probably receive *missio*, but if his submission was clearly motivated by cowardice or ineptitude, the decision of the *editor* was likely to be negative. The losing gladiator was then required to submit without resistance to a deathblow from

his winning opponent, thus at least redeeming himself with a final act of bravery.

The possibility of a tie did exist, although it was a rare occurrence because both opponents had to request *missio* at virtually the same time (Martial *Spectacles* 31.81). The term used to describe a draw was *stantes missi*, the plural of *stans missus*. We also hear of gladiator duels *sine missione* (without release), but they seem to have been relatively rare (Potter 2010: 331). In fact, Augustus banned them, but that does not mean that his prohibition was always obeyed (Suetonius *Augustus* 45.3; Petronius *Satyricon* 45.6). Spectators could, therefore, not normally expect that every match would end in a death.

Modern attempts to calculate the fatality rate among gladiators are hampered by a lack of suitable evidence, diachronic change, and the reality that the odds of survival were different for each gladiator in accordance with the level of his skill and experience. The majority of inexperienced gladiators were killed in their first or second fights, whereas skilled and experienced fighters had much better chances of survival (Dunkle 2008: 140–3).

Figure 25.2 Mosaic from a Roman villa at Bad Kreuznach, Germany, showing gladiatorial combat between a *thraex* and *murmilllo*, third century CE. *Source:* Photograph by Michael Eckrich-Neubauer. Used with permission.



All gladiators were not the same. They were divided into various types differentiated by their armor, weapons, and style of fighting, which was taught by a *doctor* (coach) in a *ludus* (gladiator school) (*ILS*

5110). For example, one of the earliest types of gladiator was the Samnite, named after an Italic people that Rome had defeated in the late fourth century BCE. Samnite gladiators adopted the armor and fighting style of Samnite warriors. It seems to have been the custom for Samnite gladiators and other early gladiators like the *gallus* (Gaul), *eques* (horseman), and *provocator* (challenger) to fight opponents of the same type. Horace mentions that a duel between two heavily armed Samnite gladiators often took up most of the afternoon (*Epistles* 2.2.98), indicating that the same armor and fighting style had a tendency to produce what must have been in many cases long, boring duels.

In the last century of the Republic, however, a new principle of pairing was introduced that matched up two gladiators of different types. The purpose of this innovation was to introduce more opportunities for strategy into the fights. There was a concerted effort to maintain fairness by making sure that any vulnerabilities created by an imbalance of armor and weapons were offset by counteracting advantages.

A classic case in point was the pairing of the *thraex* (Thracian) with the *murmillo* (no reliable translation) (see [Figure 25.2](#)). There were significant differences in the armor and weapons of these two gladiators. The *thraex* used a short curved sword called a *sica*, in contrast with the longer straight sword (*gladius*) of the *murmillo*. The *murmillo* wore a short metal shin guard only on his left leg, while the *thraex* wore metal guards on both legs that also protected the knees. In addition, the *thraex* had thick linen padding that extended from the top of the greaves to his loincloth (Junkelmann 2000a: 48–57). The reason for the extra protection for the *thraex* was the difference in the size of the shields wielded by these two gladiators. The large shield of the *murmillo* protected most of his body, while the shield of the *thraex* was less than half the size of his opponent's. What advantage was given to the *thraex* to offset his small shield? The *thraex*, taking advantage of his curved sword, could reach around his opponent's massive shield and stab him, causing a debilitating loss of blood (Aurigemma 1926: 169–70, fig. 101).

The difference in shield size of these two gladiators stirred up heated controversy among fans. Supporters of the large shield (*scutum*) were called *scutarii*, while those who preferred the smaller shield (*parma*) were *parmularii*. The debate reached up into the highest levels of Roman society, even involving the emperors Caligula, Nero, Titus, and Domitian (Suetonius *Caligula* 54.1, 55.2; *Nero* 30.2, 47.3; *Titus* 8.2; *Domitian* 10.1). In fact, this debate rose to a height of passion that paralleled the fierce loyalties to racing colors. Crescens, the passionate supporter of the blue racing faction mentioned earlier, also identified

himself as a *parmularius* on his tombstone.

Gladiators were also paired up on the basis of their skill level in order to ensure relatively even matched fights. Originally this was done on an ad hoc basis by the people in charge of training gladiators and of running gladiator shows. By the end of the first century CE gladiators were assigned to one of four different grades: *novicius* (novice), *tiro* (trained recruit), *veteranus* (survivor of first fight), and *palus*, the highest ranked group, which itself was split into four different grades according to the gladiator's level of training, experience, and success. An even more elaborate ranking system seems to have come into use in the second century (Potter 2010: 341–5).

Gladiators were for the most part convicted criminals, prisoners of war, and slaves. They were organized in troupes called *familiae*, trained by a *lanista*. For the most part their entrance into a gladiatorial *familia* was not voluntary but the result of a judicial sentence or through purchase. It was possible for a free man to volunteer to fight as a gladiator, in hope of financial rewards, and this seems to have happened more frequently as time went on. Although successful gladiators enjoyed a good deal of cachet, as might be expected in a society with a strong streak of militarism, the fact that they were slaves and performers meant that they were typically deprived of social status and many legal privileges. Cicero calls gladiators “either men of no moral worth or barbarians” (*Tusculan Disputations* 2.41). *Lanistae*, though typically free, were also low status individuals, whereas the owners of gladiatorial *familiae* tended to be wealthy aristocrats. Victorious gladiators received palm leaves and crowns as well as a portion of prize money offered by the organizers of *munera*. Manumission might be offered for particularly outstanding performances or for long service (Dunkle 2008: 30–40, 142–4). (For further discussion of gladiatorial combats, see Chapters 30, 31, and 32.)

6 Staged Animal Hunts

The first mention of a staged animal hunt (*venatio*) is as one of the events of the games vowed to Jupiter Optimus Maximus by Marcus Fulvius Nobilior while on campaign and held in Rome as part of triumphal celebration in 186 BCE (Livy 39.22.1–4; Toynbee 1973: 17). This event featured lions and leopards, no doubt a great novelty at the time. During the Republic, the most frequent site of the *venatio* was the Circus Maximus. Although the *venatio* continued to be given

occasionally at several sites in the Early Empire, including the Circus Maximus, it eventually fell under the umbrella of the *munus* and was presented in the amphitheater in the morning, while the gladiators fought in the afternoon. (On amphitheaters, see Chapter 37.) The combination of these two events became known as a *munus legitimum* (a proper *munus*).

The excitement of the *venatio* for the Romans lay in not just the bloody action but also in the opportunity to see animals from all over the Empire as a reminder of the vastness of their government's domain (Martial *Spectacles* and Coleman 2006). The Roman crowd very seldom expressed pity or dismay because of the killing of these animals, although on one famous occasion elephants with their piteous trumpeting reportedly touched the hearts of the spectators (Cicero *Letters to His Friends* 7.1.3). It should also be noted that the Romans were in awe of the beauty and ferocity of animals they watched in the arena (Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 5.14.7). Whenever the opportunity presented itself, animals never before seen at Rome would be displayed as part of the *venatio*. Caesar in his triumphal games presented a "camelopard," a hybrid neologism for the giraffe (Dio Cassius 43.23.1–2). As a demonstration of Roman mastery over wild nature, the *venatio* often featured performances of trained animals like lions, bears, and elephants (Seneca *On Benefits* 2.19.1). Perhaps the most memorable example of training was the amazing performances of dancing and dining elephants in Germanicus's *venatio* of 6 CE (Dunkle 2008: 214–15).

The main human performer of the *venatio* was the *venator* (hunter), who wore a tunic and was armed with a long hunting spear or throwing spear. *Bestiarii* (literally, beast men) are generally regarded as assistants to the *venator* in the arena, but the term seems also to have been used of those convicts sentenced to suffer the *ad bestias* penalty ((to be thrown) to the wild beasts) (Seneca *On Benefits* 2.19.1). *Venatores* came from much the same sources as gladiators, and they were prepared for the arena in an institution called the *Ludus Matutinus* (Morning School) because of their presentation in the morning. Some, such as Carpophorus, became famous (Martial *Spectacles* 17, 26, 32).

Venatores went up against big cats and bears, large herbivores like elephants and boars, and even less dangerous animals like ostriches, deer, and wild asses (Junkelmann 2000a: 71). Deer and wild boars were also the prey of trained hunting dogs, some of whom became stars of the arena (Martial *Epigrams* 11.69). The *venator*, with his spears, probably had the advantage over his animal opponents but was himself sometimes killed by his adversaries. In fact, some animals won fame for themselves to the degree that they were given names,

like the bear *Omicida*, (man killer, Toynbee 1973: 97).

The *venatio* also featured fights between animals. Bulls were often set against an elephant or a bear. In the *ludi* held to inaugurate the Colosseum in 80 CE, a rhinoceros fought a bull, bear, buffalo, bison, lion, and two steers (Martial *Spectacles* 11, 26). Animals often had to be chained together to spur them to fight.

As mentioned, another feature of the *venatio* was the execution of convicts (*damnati*) who were sentenced *ad bestias*. This harsh punishment was typically applied to criminals guilty of the worst crimes and to slaves. This manner of execution became even more popular as a spectacle because of a new category of *damnati* often subjected to this horrifying penalty, the Christians, whose unwillingness to worship the state gods often made them the object of special rancor (and sometimes pity) from the crowds (Potter 1993: 53–4). Occasionally executions in the *venatio* took on a more “artistic” form in which the victim was forced to play the starring role in a miniplay drawn loosely from Greek mythology (Coleman 1990). For example, on one occasion a convict playing Orpheus, known for his music’s mastery of nature, was torn to pieces by a bear (Martial *Spectacles* 24–5). (For further discussion of Roman spectacles involving animals, see Epplert’s essays on beast hunts and spectacular executions, Chapters 34 and 35, respectively.)

7 Staged Sea Battles

Because of the expense involved in its production, the staged sea battle or *naumachia* was reserved for truly special occasions (e.g., Rome’s millennium in 247 CE). Both Julius Caesar, for his triumphal celebrations and Augustus, for the dedication of the Temple of *Mars Ultor* in 2 BCE, created artificial lakes for their *naumachiae*, the first two ever given. We have no specific details about the size of Caesar’s *naumachia* beyond Suetonius’s comment that a “great number of fighters” took part (*Julius Caesar* 39.4). We have more detailed information about Augustus’s sea battle, which involved 30 large ships and even more small vessels. On these ships were three thousand armed marines and an unspecified number of rowers (Augustus *Res Gestae* 23).

The grandest *naumachia* of all was given by the emperor Claudius outside of Rome on a natural lake (Lake Fucinus). The spectators sat on the lake shore and on a mountainside to view the event. There were nineteen thousand marines and rowers on a hundred ships in this epic battle. Participants in a *naumachia* were typically either

damnati or prisoners of war and were expected to kill each other or drown (Dio Cassius 43.23.4). The fighters in Claudius's *naumachia* spoke the famous words, "Hail, emperor, we who are about to die salute you," mistakenly assigned to gladiators in so many films. Claudius, ever the joker, added "or not," holding out the hope of *missio* in return for a good performance (Dio Cassius 60.33.4; Suetonius *Claudius* 21.6). The *damnati* apparently thought that they would not have to fight, but they were forced by soldiers on rafts to engage each other in a fierce battle. They fought so well that survivors received pardons from Claudius (Tacitus *Annals* 12.56).

Nero gave two *naumachiae* in a new wooden amphitheater he had constructed: the first in celebration of the building's dedication in 57 CE and another seven years later. The limitation of space inside the amphitheater required downsized vessels and a smaller number of fighters and rowers. In his first *naumachia*, Nero compensated for this drawback by presenting various sea creatures swimming in the water and showing off his ability to present another spectacle in the arena immediately after his *naumachia* (Suetonius *Nero* 12.1; Dio Cassius 61.9.5). The second *naumachia* was part of an even more impressive display of the switch between water and land, this time with a double dry/wet sequence: *venatio/naumachia* and gladiatorial combat/public banquet on a floating platform (Dio Cassius 62.15.1–5).

Both Titus and his brother Domitian are said to have staged *naumachiae* in the Colosseum, the former as part of the inauguration of the building in 80 CE (Dio Cassius 66.25.2; Martial *Spectacles* 27; Suetonius *Domitian* 4.1–2). Titus imitated Nero's land/water switch by flooding the arena after an infantry skirmish. His intention seems to have been to outdo Nero when he placed in the water terrestrial animals (horses, bulls, etc.), which were trained to conduct themselves as if they were on land. There has been a long-standing debate about whether it was physically possible to flood the Colosseum and thus whether to take seriously the literary accounts purporting to describe *naumachiae* held in that building. Scholarly opinion was for a long time inclined toward doubt, but more recent work has suggested that in its early days the Colosseum could accommodate *naumachiae* (Coleman 1993: 58–60).

Beginning with the very first *naumachia*, it was the practice to provide an historical context for a sea battle, whether fictional or actual. For example, Caesar's sea battle was between the "Tyrians" and the "Egyptians," in all probability a product of his imagination. Augustus, Nero, and Titus preferred to represent real battles from Greek history: "Greeks versus Persians," "Corcyraians versus Corinthians," and "Athenians versus Syracusans." Claudius's "Sicilians versus Rhodians" was most likely unhistorical (Dunkle 2008: 192–

201). Sponsors of *naumachiae* obviously wanted to stir the imagination of spectators by recreating the grandeur of the past, whether real or imagined. There was, however, a problem with presenting historical battles in the *naumachiae*. The outcome of the battle was unpredictable; the impersonators of historical winners could lose. In one of Titus's *naumachiae*, the Athenians defeated the Syracusans, a reversal of history, indicating that it probably did not matter very much to the Romans who won (Dio Cassius 66.25.4). As we have seen, historical settings involving real battles were limited to Greek history. This limitation can be explained by the Romans' reluctance to risk a loss by fighters representing Romans (Coleman 1993: 72–3). (For further discussion of *naumachiae*, see Chapter 38.)

8 Greek Athletics

The *ludi* of Marcus Fulvius Nobilior in 186 BCE were also the occasion of the first display of Greek athletics at Rome. These games probably consisted of a full complement of Greek athletic events: combat sports (boxing, wrestling, and *pankration* – a combination of boxing and wrestling) and the lighter track and field games (footraces and the pentathlon). This precedent does not seem to have warranted a repeat presentation of Greek athletics at Rome for almost a century and a half. In 55 BCE Pompey presented Greek athletics among his dedicatory *ludi* for his theater, the first permanent stone theater at Rome. The crowd's reaction must have fallen below Pompey's expectations because he complained afterwards of having wasted effort and money in acquiring oil for the athletes (with which they covered their body prior to competition) (Cicero *Letters to His Friends* 7.1.3). Perhaps the lighter athletic events were too tame for the Romans, who were used to violent action in their *ludi*. Caesar, for his triumphal celebration, built a temporary stadium in the Campus Martius for three days of Greek athletics (Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 39.3). There is no mention of the spectators' reaction, but one wonders whether there was a better response than in Pompey's show. Another problem for the Romans was their objection to Greek athletic nudity, which many feared would encourage homosexual activity among their youth (Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 4.70; Tacitus *Annals* 14.20; for more on Roman criticisms of Greek sport, see Chapter 41).

Early in the Imperial period, however, Greek athletics began to enjoy wider acceptance at Rome, probably due in part to the promotion of Augustus, who in his *Res Gestae* mentions two spectacles he sponsored that consisted of athletes from all over the Empire. Later

in the same document he puts Greek athletics on an equal level with gladiatorial combat, the *venatio*, and the *naumachia* as spectacles on which he has spent an immeasurable amount of money (22, summary). He also displayed great generosity to athletes, preserving and even increasing their much-prized privileges (Suetonius *Augustus* 45.3).

Greek athletics found a special champion in Nero, who created a Greek-style festival in Rome called the Neroneia, featuring musical, athletic, and equestrian contests (Suetonius *Nero* 12.3). Although this festival did not survive Nero's death, Domitian instituted another set of athletic contests, the Capitoline Games, which were held in Rome starting in 86 CE. Not only did these games survive the assassination of Domitian, a most unpopular emperor, but they continued to be celebrated at least well into the third century CE and probably beyond (Dio Cassius 79.10.2; Newby 2005: 28–37). In 143 CE Antoninus Pius confirmed his father's (Hadrian) grant of a meeting hall (*curia athletarum*) near Trajan's baths in Rome for the use of members of a guild of Greek athletes during the Capitoline Games. The imposing name of this guild suggests the high status of its members: Xystic Synod of the Heraklean Athletic Winners of Sacred Games and Crowns (*Inscriptiones Graecae* XIV 1055b; on guilds see Chapter 6). (For further discussion of Greek sport in Rome, see Chapter 36.)

9 Conclusion

Spectacles enjoyed a long run of popularity as an essential part of Roman life, but by the early third century CE Christian writers were raising strident voices condemning the shows. Tertullian in his *On Spectacles* is a prime example. His objections include pleasure as damaging to a person's morality (1.2–6), idolatry promoted by the games (4.3), lasciviousness of the theater (10.3–4), death as entertainment (12.1–4), madness in spectators of chariot races exacerbated by betting (16.1–2), and violence and vain displays of strength in Greek athletics (18.1–3). Despite these objections and later polemics, spectacles continued to be presented (although probably less frequently because of third-century political chaos) and were even attended by Christians. Imperial pressure during the fourth century, leading to the suppression of pagan ritual and sanctuaries by Theodosius I in the 390s, was no doubt the beginning of the end for the Roman spectacle (Mitchell 2007: 244–51). The *ludi Megalenses*, *Cereales* (games for the Italian fertility goddess Ceres), and *Apollinares* continued to be presented but no longer with their pagan titles

(Balsdon 1969: 251). Some spectacles survived longer than others. Gladiator shows were the first to vanish, probably by the first quarter of the fifth century, while the *venatio* continued to be given for another century (Dunkle 2008: 201–6, 243–4). We last hear of theatrical presentations in the sixth-century author Cassiodorus (*Variae* 9.21.8). Chariot racing, which was much less controversial as far as Christianity was concerned, survived in Rome until the middle of the sixth century (Balsdon 1969: 252), while at the same time in Constantinople under Justinian it was enjoying its golden age. Economic troubles led to a continual decline of the sport after Justinian, which survived in a much diminished form at least into the tenth century (Cameron 1973: 256–8; see Chapter 43).

ABBREVIATIONS

ILS = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*

NOTE

- 1 The numbering of the poems in Martial's *Spectacles* in this chapter is that of Shackleton Bailey (1993).

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The best place to start is with Futrell 2006 and Shelton 1998, both of which offer a combination of translated source material and excellent commentary. A handy supplement to both is Balsdon 1969, which covers a much greater number of sources, but with sparser discussion. Readers of German interested in a detailed scholarly analysis of *ludi* will find it in Bernstein 1998. Cameron 1973 and 1976 are seminal works that cover the history of chariot racing. Humphrey 1986 is a comprehensive study of circuses throughout the Empire and a seemingly inexhaustible source of information about chariot racing. A good introduction to Roman drama, including translations of excerpts from Latin plays, can be found in Manuwald 2010.

Dunkle 2008 is a good introduction to Roman gladiatorial combats that seeks to explain the Roman tolerance of lethal violence as entertainment by reference to cultural considerations. Fagan 2011 addresses the same subject from the perspective of social psychology. Edwards 1997 takes up the important social issue of the low status of performers and the participation of aristocrats and emperors as performers in spectacles. An introduction to the *venatio* can be found in Dunkle 2008: 207–44. Two indispensable articles by Coleman lucidly discuss the remarkable blend of entertainment and violent justice (1990) and the role of aquatic spectacles (1993) in imperial spectacle. In addition, Coleman 2006 has provided a major new translation and commentary on Martial's *Spectacles*. Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000 present a large number of excellent images that bring the Roman spectacle to life. Especially notable are Junkelmann's fine contributions to that volume on gladiators and chariot racing (Junkelmann 2000a and b), the former fortified by his practical experimentation with gladiatorial armor and combat. On Greek sport in the Roman world, see Chapter 36 and Newby 2005.

Veyne 1990 is a valuable study of a phenomenon in the Greek and Roman world called “euergetism,” the public generosity of prominent individuals that was indispensable to the life of the spectacle. Potter 2006b and 2010 are essential reading, the first an interesting overview of Roman spectacle in six sections, of which the last two are especially recommended, while the second offers a detailed examination of the Roman entertainment industry.

CHAPTER 26

Etruscan Sport

Giampiero Bevagna

1 Introduction

In the first century BCE the Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassos described the Etruscans as “a very ancient people resembling no other either in language or customs” (*Roman Antiquities* 1.30.2, trans. J. Kirkup). It remains true that we still have much to learn about this people, who lived in west-central Italy from the ninth century BCE onward.¹ For instance, it is unclear if they were descended directly from the earlier indigenous population of the area or if, as many ancient Greeks believed, they immigrated to Italy from Asia Minor. A major difficulty is that Etruscan literary sources do not survive and, insofar as our understanding of the Etruscans’ language is far from complete, the many extant Etruscan inscriptions are less helpful than they might be.

It is not surprising then that, compared to Greece and Rome, our knowledge of sport in the Etruscan world is rather limited. References in Greek and Latin authors provide a modicum of information, and it is clear that in the Greek and Roman imaginary Etruscans were closely linked to sport. For example, the Greek historian Herodotus (1.94), in discussing the (ostensible) origin of the Etruscans in Lydia in Asia Minor, reports that, under the stress of famine, they invented games to help them forget their sufferings. In a similar vein, the Roman author Tertullian (*On Spectacles* 5.2) supplies a (probably spurious) etymology for the Latin word *ludus* (“game”) from “Lydis” (“from the Lydians”). However, Greek and Latin sources must be used with caution because they were not written by Etruscans and are by no means always accurate.

By far the most important source of information about Etruscan

sport is visual evidence, most of it produced by and for Etruscans, which survives in considerable quantity and in various media ranging from ceramics to frescoes. Analysis of these images is the most promising method of learning about Etruscan sport.

However, iconographic analysis requires careful consideration of two major problems that concern the entire discipline of Etruscology. First, we must keep in mind the question of the complicated relationship between artistic images and reality: how much do images of Etruscan sport tell us about Etruscan games as they really were? How and how much does the purpose for which an object was made impinge on the fidelity of the representation it conveys? This problem can only be addressed through scrutiny of the social and physical contexts in which individual objects were used and found and requires an awareness of how individual objects taken together comprise an interrelated corpus of material that needs to be understood as a whole (Spivey 1997: 7–24).

The second major problem concerns the relationship between Greek and Etruscan culture. Etruscan visual culture was strongly influenced by Greek models and we must, therefore, consider the extent to which each Etruscan image reflects that influence. We must also give thought to the possibility that these images depart from Etruscan realities in order to appropriate Greek models. This issue is particularly acute when it comes to sport because it has been argued that Etruscan sport was heavily influenced by Greek sport (see the discussion in Thuillier 1997).

The nature of Etruscan sport and the relationship between Greek, Etruscan, and Roman sport and spectacle are the main subjects of this essay. Analysis of the representations of sport in Etruscan art shows that, even if they had a Greek iconographic model to which to refer, Etruscan artists did not follow it slavishly and were influenced by the factual reality of the competitions conducted in their culture. This underscores the degree of autonomy in Etruscan figurative art, which, even if clearly indebted to Greek art, never relinquished its own character. As Jean-Paul Thuillier rightly points out (1985: 410; cf. Thuillier 1997), we need not interpret everything in the Etruscan iconographic evidence for sport by reference to the relevant Greek material. There is, in fact, nothing to suggest that the sports played by the Etruscans were necessarily imported from other cultures. This does not preclude that they might have been shaped to some extent over the course of time by Greek influences. Nonetheless, these influences do not appear to have profoundly altered the original nature of these sports as they were played in Etruria. From its beginning, Etruscan sport shows characteristics that set it apart from its Greek equivalent indicating, therefore, a marked originality. In fact, there is, as we will

see, good reason to believe that Etruscan sport was closer to Roman spectacle than Greek sport.

The following essay begins with a consideration of early depictions of Etruscan sport and then looks at events, equipment, the social status of athletes, and the social and physical contexts in which Etruscan sport took place. It will be helpful as we move forward to keep in mind that Etruscan history is typically divided by modern scholars into the following periods:

- Villanovan phase (900–720)
- Orientalizing period (720–575)
- Archaic period (575–480)
- Classical period (480–300)
- Roman-Etruscan period (300–100).

Although some of these periods bear the same names as the periods into which Greek history is divided by modern scholars, the chronology of Etruscan and Greek historical periods, even those with identical names, diverges in significant ways.

2 Early Depictions of Etruscan Sport

There are no clear representations of athletic activities in the Etruscan world prior to the Late Orientalizing period. The few images that can be dated earlier, artifacts from the Villanovan era in particular, are so ambiguous that a secure interpretation is not possible.

It is clear, however, that sport, particularly boxing and wrestling, was already part of Etruscan life by the end of the seventh century. Both boxing and wrestling are depicted on pottery and in bronze statuettes datable to the late seventh and early sixth centuries and thus appear to be the oldest sports in the Etruscan world.² Datable to not much later (the beginning of the sixth century) are images of horse racing on terracotta slabs, which were found in the excavations of the so-called Palace of Murlo (Rathje 2004–7; Thuillier 1985: 82–7).³

The Etruscan iconographic evidence finds support in a passage from the work of the Roman historian Livy on King Tarquinius Priscus of Rome, whose reign is typically dated to around 600 and who was probably Etruscan. Livy (1.35.7–9) reports that, in order to celebrate a military victory, Tarquinius instituted games more splendid and sumptuous than those of prior kings of Rome. He also prepared a

venue for these games, the Circus Maximus, complete with (probably wooden and temporary) grandstands for spectators from Rome's ruling class. The games consisted of horse races and boxing matches, with the competitors brought in chiefly from Etruria. Livy's account thus supports what we know from iconographic sources.

The number of extant images becomes noticeably greater during the Archaic period, in large part because of finds from the most famous cemetery at Tarquinia, one of the main Etruscan cities (see [Map 26.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay). That cemetery, known in the present day as Monterozzi, contains six thousand rock-cut tombs, most of which consist of a burial chamber accessed via a sloping or stepped corridor. Of the six thousand tombs at Monterozzi, roughly two hundred have elaborately painted interiors. The earliest of these date to the seventh century, but it was only in the sixth century that this style of decoration took hold and interiors were completely covered in paint.⁴

The Tomb of the Augurs, which is dated to 540–530, is one of the oldest and most important tombs at Tarquinia that contain depictions of sport. The paintings in this tomb include three sport scenes (Brendel 1995: 168–71; Steingraber 1986: 283). The left-hand wall of the rectangular burial chamber shows two nude boxers framed on one side by a flute player and on the other by a masked, bearded figure wearing a pointed cap, who is moving energetically (perhaps dancing or running?). On the far side of the right-hand wall a pair of nude wrestlers, one bearded and one beardless, is depicted, with a stack of three large basins (presumably the prize for the winner) between them (see [Figure 26.1](#)). To their left is a clothed male who is holding a curved rod, known in Latin as a *lituus*, and gesturing toward two birds flying over the wrestlers. The word TEVARATH is written over his head (though it has now faded due to the deterioration of the painting that occurred after the tomb was excavated). The *lituus* was closely associated with augury (interpreting divine will based on the flight of birds), so this figure is beyond doubt an augur. The most interesting of the three scenes in the tomb unfolds next to the wrestlers. Just to the right of the wrestlers is another masked, bearded figure wearing a pointed cap, over whose head was written the word PHERSU (likely the Etruscan word for “mask”). The masked man holds a long leash attached to a large dog. Between this man and the dog is another man, wearing only a loincloth, with a sack covering his head and a large club in his right hand. The dog is biting the thigh of the man with the sack on his head, who evidently is trying to defend himself with the club. Scholars typically refer to the activity shown in this scene as the “Phersu game.” Similar scenes have been found in a handful of other Etruscan tombs, including the Tomb of the Olympics at Tarquinia, and

a single Etruscan black-figure vase.

Map 26.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.

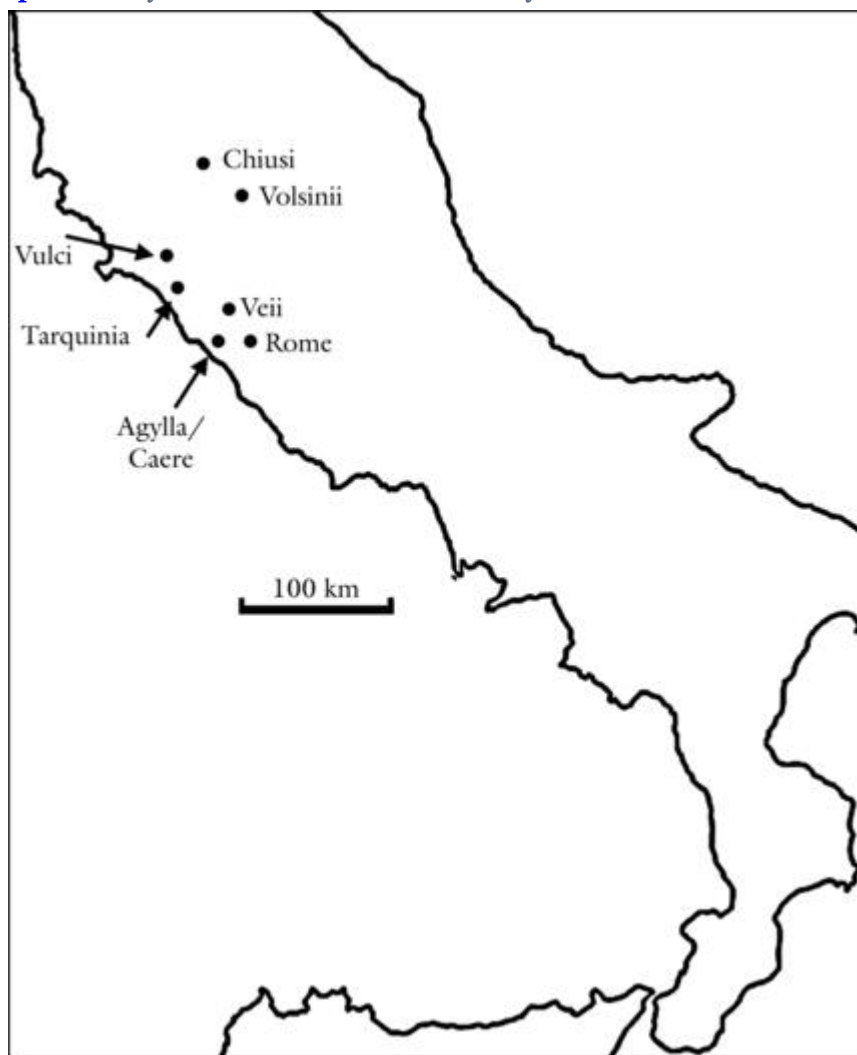


Figure 26.1 Wall painting from the Tomb of the Augurs at Tarquinia showing wrestlers and the “Phersu game,” c.540–530 BCE. *Source:* Photograph by Romualdo Moscioni (24 133), American Academy in Rome, Photographic Archive.



The scene of Phersu in the Tomb of the Augurs has provoked a great deal of scholarly debate, especially concerning its possible relevance to the origins of Roman gladiatorial combats. Lammert Bouke van der Mere (1982) cites the “Phersu game” as part of his argument that Roman gladiatorial games had an Etruscan origin. Paul Plass (1995: 57–8) sees a combination of gladiatorial combat and exposure to animals, with Phersu playing the role of a circus master orchestrating the violence. Jean-Paul Thuillier (1985: 338–40, 587–90; cf. Thuillier 1990) argues that the Phersu figure is acting as an executioner in an Etruscan version of the practice of exposing a doomed victim to a beast (*damnatio ad bestias*, on which see Chapter 35 in this volume). Georges Ville (1981: 2–6) feels that the “Phersu game” formed part of funeral games, that it was more footrace than bloodsport, and that the object was to spill blood and not to kill the man. Denise Rebuffat-Emmanuel (1983) suggests that the “Phersu game” was a sacred drama that reenacted Herakles’ descent to Hades and his struggle with Cerberus. Amalia Avramidou (2009) interprets this scene as a parody of the reenactments of the myth of Orpheus that took place as part of the rites of some mystery cults. It thus remains uncertain whether the scene represents a staged combat, execution, contest, drama, or some other form of performance.

The paintings in three other tombs from Tarquinia include noteworthy sport scenes. The Tomb of the Inscriptions (540–530) contains scenes of boxing and wrestling as well as depictions of horsemen, who are perhaps waiting to participate in a race (Steingraber 1986: 314–5; Sannibale 2004: fig 5). Slightly later (530–520) is the Tomb of the Olympics, on the right-hand wall of which there are depictions of a nude discus thrower, a jumper, and three runners, as well as a heavily damaged depiction of the “Phersu game” (Brendel 1995: 268; Steingraber 1986: 328–9). The rear wall shows three naked runners and a naked jumper, the left wall a boxer and a race involving four two-horse chariots, one of which has crashed. Equally interesting but for a different reason is the Tomb of the Chariots (500–475; Brendel 1995: 266–9; Steingraber 1986: 289–91).

Here the sport scenes, which feature nude athletes engaged in a variety of exercises including boxing and wrestling, are relegated to a small upper frieze. These scenes are framed by detailed portrayals of spectators. The audience sits on wooden bleachers, sheltered by an awning. Underneath the risers, there is a crowd of lower status individuals, probably slaves. The seated and elegantly dressed figures are probably of aristocratic rank. Among them are several female figures, some of whom occupy prominent positions. One woman in particular, given her position and her gesture, might even be understood as presiding over the games. This fresco demonstrates that women were present at Etruscan spectacles.⁵ Figure 26.2a and Figure 26.2b show drawings of the rear wall of the tomb, the paintings in which faded badly after excavation (for a fuller reproduction, see Sannibale 2004: fig. 6).

Figure 26.2a Drawing of the paintings on the rear wall of the Tomb of Chariots at Tarquinia showing athletic contests and spectators, c.500–490 BCE. *Source:* Based on O. Stackelberg and A. Kestner, *Unedierte Gräber von Corneto* (1830), pl. 2.

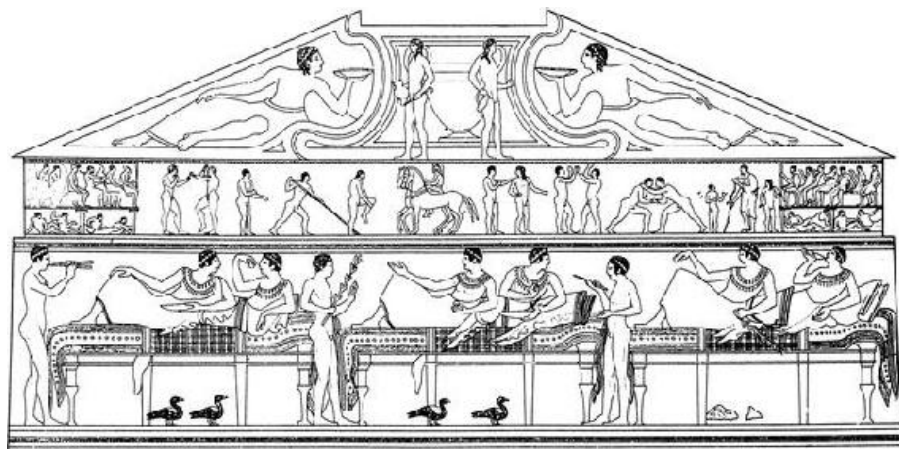
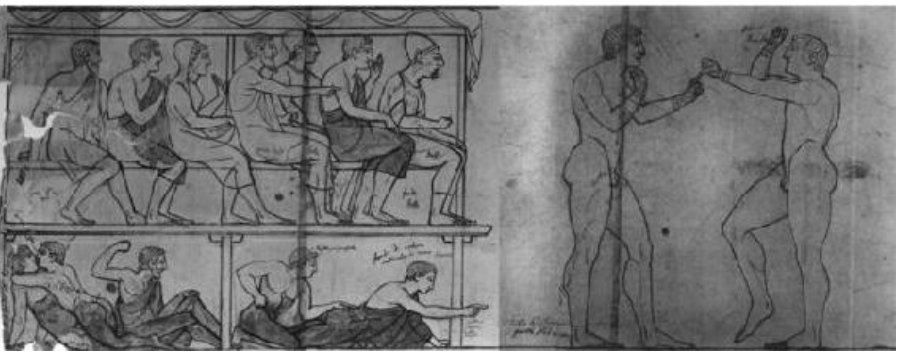


Figure 26.2b Detailed drawing of the painting in the upper left corner of the rear wall of the Tomb of Chariots at Tarquinia showing spectators and boxers. *Source:* German Archaeological Institute Rome (Schwanke, Neg. D-DAI-ROM 79.943 and 79.989).



The cemeteries at the Etruscan city of Chiusi have also produced remains dating to the Archaic period that contribute significantly to our understanding of Etruscan sport. The plentiful extant funerary markers (*cippi*, singular *cippus*) from Chiusi offer a number of sport scenes (Jannot 1984; Brendel 1995: 207–12).⁶ The tombs of Chiusi also boast frescoes with sports themes.⁷ Of particular interest are the paintings in the Tomb of the Monkey (c.480), which show a chariot race as well as two wrestlers, a javelin thrower, and two boxers, all nude (Brendel 1995: 274–7; Steingraber 1986: 273–4). The action takes place under the gaze of a woman seated beneath an umbrella. She is either the deceased person for whom games are being offered or the wife of the deceased, but either way she seems to preside over the games.

3 Events

Boxing and chariot races are the two sports most often represented in Etruscan art. As far as boxing is concerned, the pictorial schema shows only minimal variation: a rather static image with two boxers facing each other in a guard position, with their fists, in leather wraps, lifted high in front of their faces. Sometimes a prize is shown between the two boxers. Blows are directed at the face; blows to the body are almost unknown. Thuillier believes that such brutal fights could not have lasted long. Toughness and physical strength, more than technique, determined the victor (1985: 243). To judge from the images, competitors were not matched based on age or weight. There is some controversy as to whether there was a sort of “ring” to delimit the space of the action. A flute player regularly appears in depictions of boxing matches, and it is probable that music punctuated the rhythm of the encounter.⁸

As for equestrian events, whereas we have pictorial documents of

horse races from the beginning of the sixth century in the Murlo terracottas, the earliest extant depiction of chariot racing in Etruscan art occurs on a black-figure amphora dated to the middle of the sixth century (Bronson 1965: 95). Richard Bronson (1965: 94) asserts that “it is impossible to determine when, why or how chariot-racing was first introduced into Etruria. However, . . . its formal institution must have been of Hellenic inspiration.” Even if this is true, which is by no means certain, Greek influence was not so strong as to cancel out indigenous elements. Differences between Greek and Etruscan equestrian contests are noticeable in the clothing of the jockeys, the fashion in which charioteers secured their reins, and the type of goad employed. In Etruria, moreover, only two- and three-horse chariots were used, never four-horse chariots, which were common in Greek equestrian contests and which subsequently became the norm in Rome.⁹

Another discipline related to equestrian sport is that of the *desultores*, “horse dismounters,” of whom we find representations in Etruria from the sixth century onwards (Thuillier 1989a). In this event, acrobatic horsemen (or equestrian acrobats) combined horseback riding and footraces. A good example is found in the Tomb of the Master of the Olympiads (530–520) at Tarquinia (not to be confused with the Tomb of the Olympiads, Steingraber 1986: 321).

Wrestling was one of the first sports to appear in Etruscan art and, to judge from the number of depictions, was quite popular. The portrayal of wrestlers on Etruscan artifacts suggests that the Etruscan version of this sport did not differ markedly from its Greek counterpart; the primary goal was to throw one’s adversary to the ground. Unlike boxing, there is no evidence that music was played during wrestling matches. The number and geographical distribution of artifacts in Etruria suggests that in the town of Chiusi (inland eastern Etruria) wrestling was the favorite sport, whereas the residents of southern Etruria (specifically in Tarquinia) preferred boxing (Thuillier 1985: 283). This is a salutary reminder that there was a considerable amount of regional variation within the area of Etruscan settlement in Italy, so that generalizations can be made only with some caution.¹⁰

Depictions of all five components of the ancient pentathlon – jump, discus, javelin, wrestling, and running – are found in Etruscan art but they appear for the first time slightly after the earliest scenes of boxing and horse racing and are always comparatively infrequent. (Most of the relevant depictions appear on metal appliquéés, as if this type of iconography was considered more appropriate for that type of artifact.) The just-cited Tomb of the Olympiads shows, in addition to chariot racing and the “Phersu game,” scenes of running, long jump,

and discus. The paintings in the Tomb of Poggio al Moro in Chiusi (470–450) show four of the five standard Greek pentathlon disciplines (only the javelin throw is missing, Steingraber 1986: 271–2). In no instance are all five disciplines represented together in Etruscan art, but such depictions are rare in Greek art as well. According to Thuillier, because of the absence of literary texts or inscriptions, we cannot be certain that a true Etruscan pentathlon existed (2001: 16). Gigliola Gori (1986: 62), on the other hand, concludes that this composite discipline existed in Etruria. She believes, however, that in the Etruscan pentathlon the javelin was replaced by boxing (as it was later in the Roman *certamen quinquertium*).¹¹

In Greek athletics, the pentathlon included the rough equivalent of a 200-meter dash, and footraces of varying lengths were held as stand-alone events. The evidence for footraces in Etruria is scanty and, if there was indeed an Etruscan pentathlon, it is impossible to know the length of the footrace that was held as part of that event or whether footraces were held as stand-alone events. A key problem is the absence of stadia, the venue for footraces in the Greek world. Moreover, no extant image portrays the start of a race, as a result of which it is impossible to tell how that was arranged in Etruria. There are very few images of runners wearing arms or armor, which suggests that the race-in-armor, the Greek *hoplitodromos*, was rarely held by Etruscans.

Other, albeit less popular, sports were also practiced in Etruria. There is a certain amount of visual and archaeological evidence suggesting that Etruscans held competitions in the shot put and the Tomb of the Chariots in Tarquinia preserves what appears to be a depiction of pole vaulting (Gori 1986: 47, 60; 1986/7).

4 Equipment

Etruscan athletes are shown either naked or clothed in basic, practical garments. Nudity is found in Etruscan depictions of sport from the middle of the sixth century onward, particularly in works in which Greek influence is most visible. Therefore, the images do not unequivocally show that Etruscan athletes competed in the nude (Bonfante 2000; McDonnell 1993; Shapiro 2000). It appears that the Etruscans were familiar with athletic nudity but did not always practice it, probably for practical reasons. They wore a variety of garments suited to their physical exertions, including a short tunic with an attached skirt. Some Etruscan athletes seem to have used something like an athletic supporter, consisting of a sort of strap

attached to a belt.¹²

The numerous finds of vases intended to hold olive oil and of strigils (curved scrapers used to remove oil from the skin after exercise) make it probable that Etruscan athletes, like their Greek counterparts, were in the habit of oiling their bodies. The use of oil is also confirmed by finds of mirrors with images of athletes using strigils. (Strigils, however, are not shown in Etruscan frescoes.) Olive oil, which was originally imported from Greece, was produced in Etruria starting sometime around the end of the seventh century. It is hard to say whether oil, as in Greece, was one of the prizes awarded to athletic victors; there are numerous depictions of vessels of various kinds offered as prizes for athletes but their contents are not made clear (Thuillier 1985: 353–61; Thuillier 1989b).

One *cippus* from Chiusi shows the moment of the awarding of prizes. Seated on a dais are the magistrates organizing the games and a scribe, who is most likely recording on a tablet the names of the winners. In front of them two athletes are waiting for their prizes (wineskins kept under the dais) (Colonna 1976).

5 Social Status of Athletes

Etruscan athletes show every sign of having been professionals of inferior social standing and seem to have formed a class of specialists directly employed by the Etruscan aristocracy (Thuillier 1985: 520–9). One might compare them to the artisans who decorated temples and tombs or to the various artists, such as dancers and actors, who provided entertainment at religious festivals. Livy tells a story about a king of the Etruscan city of Veii who, having been angered, brought contests being held at the sanctuary of Voltumna to a halt when “he suddenly withdrew the performers, most of whom were his own slaves [*servi*], in the middle of the games” (5.1.4, trans. C. Roberts). Livy’s use of the term *servi* does not imply that athletes lived in materially worse conditions than those of the *penestes*, free men working in agriculture or mining (Heurgon 1964: 57–9). On the contrary, they may have enjoyed better living conditions. It must have been in the Etruscan master’s interest to take good care of his athletes, in order to obtain better performance. Moreover, although there can be little doubt that athletes were not typically people of high social status, it is not certain that they were all slaves (Thuillier 1985: 522–29, 689–92).

We cannot ascertain what Etruscan athletes did in “retirement.” Because they were professionals of low status, Etruscan athletes were not buried with honors or with the instruments of their profession. In

a very few tombs images of athletes record their names (e.g., the two wrestlers in the Tomb of the Augurs, above whose heads are written TEITU and LATHITE), which implies that some athletes developed a certain level of fame. However, no Etruscan inscription records the entire career of an athlete, something that was common in the Greek world. The Etruscan words whose meanings are known and that refer to sport, such as SUPLU or SUBLO (flute player, Heurgon 1964: 188) and TEVARATH (someone who presides over a contest), designate persons who had functions relating to the competition, not to athletes themselves (Thuillier 1985: 541–8). One might speculate that retired athletes trained and managed those still actively competing, and it is logical to suppose that the best Etruscan athletes would have had a greater chance of manumission.

The relatively low status of athletes in Etruria stood in sharp contrast to the situation in Greece. Sport was an activity that, in most times and places in the Greek world, was closely associated with free men of relatively high status. There is nothing to suggest that members of the Etruscan aristocracy participated in athletic contests, as they did in Greece.¹³ And even if young aristocrats participated in horse races or other disciplines, that cannot be generalized to Etruscan sport overall.

6 The Social Contexts of Etruscan Sport

Etruscan sport was closely linked to funeral rites. The funerary games portrayed with great frequency in Etruscan art are a key moment in the funerary rituals held for members of the Etruscan elite. Analysis of the visual evidence suggests that those rituals had four basic components: the *prothesis* (the laying out of the corpse), a banquet, games, and shows (dances and plays). Most of the evidence for Etruscan sport comes from funerary contexts, the walls of tombs and the sides of grave markers in particular. The most obvious explanation for this phenomenon is that these depictions served as records of the funeral ceremonies, including games that were held in honor of the deceased. Several scholars have plausibly conjectured (see, for instance, Holloway 1965 and Stopponi 1983: 62–4) that the structure of the burial chambers in Etruscan tombs imitates a tent for spectators, thus reproducing the pavilion from which the members of the nobility observed funeral ceremonies. Sport scenes appear alongside banqueting scenes, which suggests that the banqueters are

also the spectators at the spectacles (athletic contests, plays, and dancing) that were held at funerals. On the walls of the tomb are depicted the events that the spectators would have seen from the tent. (Even differences in the size of the figures shown in the paintings might reflect the perspective of spectators looking out of the tent.) “The funeral ceremony is thus recorded not only in the painting of the banquet, the dances, and the games, but even in the re-creation of the setting of these events” (Thuillier 1985: 638). Reproducing the ceremony in the art decorating the tomb ensured the permanent reiteration of the rite, in order to extend its efficaciousness for all eternity.

It is clear that the funeral ceremonies immortalized on the walls of tombs were the privilege of a very exclusive social class and served to mark the high status of the deceased and of his or her family. We must also not lose sight of the fact that in Tarquinia, only a few of the painted tombs, which themselves comprise about 2 percent of all the burial sites, show images of games. This may suggest that most if not all tombs painted with sport scenes belonged to city magistrates, who were the only people whose funeral games were worthy of memorialization (Benassai 2001).

That would in turn suggest that the funerals at which much Etruscan sport took place were at least to some extent public rather than private events. Thuillier notes that “if the pomp of the ceremonies reflects on certain aristocratic families and reinforces their prestige, the fact that the dead were sometimes magistrates of their city, the fact that the entire apparatus of public power . . . could accompany the procession, the fact that the entire population attended these games gave a clearly public character to these spectacular celebrations” (1996: 35). The example of the Tomb of the Chariots is revealing; the presence of the public on the stands and slaves underneath shows that these games exceed the private sphere of a single family. Rita Benassai calls them “a conspicuous event in the community of Tarquinia,” in which “the deceased most likely held a special role. Probably he was a magistrate who himself had organized games, or had presided over them as the highest political functionary” (2001: 245).

Beyond the athletic contests held as part of noble burials, we may consider two other types of games: those organized by towns and those organized by federations that linked together the various Etruscan cities.¹⁴ The evidence for the existence of games organized by individual Etruscan towns is tenuous. Herodotus (1.167) states that sometime around the middle of the sixth century the residents of the Etruscan town of Agylla (more properly known as Caere) stoned to death a substantial number of Greek prisoners of war and that,

afterwards, animals and humans passing the site of the slaughter became paralyzed. The Agyllans (ostensibly at least) consulted with Delphi and were told to make recurring sacrifices to the dead and to hold horse races and other sports contests in their honor.¹⁵ We have already seen that Livy (1.35.7–9) reports on Tarquinius Priscus, an Etruscan king of Rome, founding games and building the Circus Maximus. These two passages do not constitute a substantial body of evidence, but we might well imagine that every town would have celebrated its principal deity, or the deities of the most important sanctuaries, and that those celebrations would have involved games.

As for games organized by Etruscan federations, the only certain source is the so-called Rescritto di Spello (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 11.5265), an inscription that records a decision of the Roman emperor Constantine I and that dates to the first half of the fourth century CE. This inscription attests to the existence of games held annually by a league that linked together 12 of the most important Etruscan cities.¹⁶ These games were evidently held near the town of Volsinii, at the sanctuary of Voltumna, likely the patron deity of the league. The annual assembly probably ceased to exist after 264, the year in which the Romans destroyed the town of Volsinii, but resumed in some form at a later date, and the Rescritto di Spello inscription refers to these new festivities. The text of the Rescritto actually mentions plays and gladiatorial combats (and not sport contests), but we have no way of knowing what took place originally.¹⁷ Thuillier believes that the introduction of gladiatorial combats must have been a later addition, which supplanted earlier and more typically Etruscan boxers and wrestlers (1985: 431).

A passage from Livy (5.1.4) referenced above provides some clarification of the nature of the events held at the sanctuary of Voltumna before 264. Livy reports that during a war between Rome and the Etruscan city of Veii, the people of Veii opted to elect a king as their leader but that he was not particularly beloved because of his arrogance. Livy provides as an example of his undesirable behavior an episode that happened at the sanctuary of Voltumna near Volsinii. This king of Veii had not been elected *sacerdos* (a title which most probably refers to the priest-magistrate who represented the league of Etruscan cities at the sanctuary), and he decided, out of spite and in disrespect of the sacredness of the rites, to withdraw his slaves from the games, thus interrupting their progress.

The Rescritto di Spello and the passage from Livy thus point to the existence of athletic contests organized by a league linking together the 12 main Etruscan cities. Some scholars have hypothesized that there were also smaller leagues, which also organized games.

All the different contexts in which Etruscan sport took place had a

strong religious valence (Thuillier 1985: 419–60). This is made clear by the presence in numerous sport scenes of figures carrying a *lituus* (the curved rod associated with augurs). The *lituus* was a key symbol of religious and political authority in Etruria, and the person who carried it was a priest-magistrate. In the context of representations of sport he is the TEVARATH, the person who presides over the contest (the equivalent of an *agonothetes* in Greece). He is not, therefore, simply a referee. The referee exists, but holds a different instrument: a long staff, bifurcated at one end. The terracotta slabs from Murlo illustrate the difference. In one of them both figures are present: the TEVARATH, seated on a throne, carrying the symbol of authority, and the referee, standing with his long staff in hand. The first figure could be seen as a kind of *dominus*, an overlord, who presides over the games and whose religious function is underscored by the *lituus*. He is accompanied by another standing figure, who carries his weapons, symbols of his military might; the *dominus* has temporarily set aside his weapons to take up the *lituus*, thus emphasizing the different roles he plays at different moments.

7 The Physical Contexts of Etruscan Sport

Representations of sport in Etruscan art strongly suggest that games were held in the open countryside and, in the case of funeral games, probably not far from the cemetery. There is nothing that indicates the existence of large buildings in urban settings that were used for sport. This explains the habitual depiction of stylized trees in scenes that include sport: they evoke an outdoors setting.

Games that did not involve chariot races seem to (in some cases at least) have taken place in terraced areas near the tomb of the deceased person in whose honor athletic contests were being held. Some tombs at Tarquinia dating to the seventh century include a theaterlike structure in the form of a large pathway, resembling a small *piazza*, that leads to the tomb and that is often framed by steps, which were presumably intended to accommodate spectators (Colonna 1993). In the sixth century some tombs at Blera and Vulci exhibit the same feature. The example most often noted is the space in front of the Tomb of Cuccumella (570–550), a sort of small private “stadium.” However, it is important to keep in mind that these were multipurpose structures and surely not exclusively dedicated to athletic activities.

There is in Etruria no archaeological evidence whatsoever for the

existence of permanent structures dedicated to games (Thuillier 1985: 347–9). And, despite the profound Hellenization of Etruscan culture, neither are there signs of the existence of two quintessential Greek sports venues: the *palaistra* and the *gymnasion* (on which see Chapter 19). Moreover, whereas Greeks created specialized buildings for different types of competition (stadium and hippodrome), Etruscans seem to have used a single space for all different kinds of sport, a space that was something like a primitive version of the later Roman circus (Thuillier 2001: 17–18). These were simple open areas, provided with temporary wooden seating, where any type of competition could be held. It is therefore not so strange that no Etruscan equivalent to the Circus Maximus in Rome has yet been discovered. We do not know enough of the topography of Etruscan cities to be able to say so with certainty but, as Giovanni Colonna has noted, “in every large Etruscan city one can make out level areas suited to horse and chariot-races” (1993: n. 172).

8 Conclusion

Although there was considerable overlap in regard to events and equipment, Greeks and Etruscans had radically different conceptions of sport. Scenes of sport and spectacle in Etruscan art frequently have grotesque overtones, and this renders the Etruscan depictions very different in spirit from the Greek representations. The closest parallels to the “Phersu game,” if it, as seems most plausible, should be understood as some kind of violent spectacle, are not to be found in the Greek world.

It is important to emphasize that Etruscan games were above all spectator sports; everything was done in Etruria to please those who watch. In the audience we find the ruling classes, decked out with symbols of their power, enjoying the show; on the field of competition we find the athletes, professionals of low social standing. In contrast to Greece, sport in Etruria was not a privileged locus for status competition by free men. We do not have a complete picture of Etruscan sport, but it is clear that “the Etruscan situation is closer to Rome than to Athens” (Thuillier 1985: 612).

From the end of the fifth century, there is a clear change in Etruscan iconography. The scenes of games fade away and almost disappear. Can we consider their diminishment in the fifth century as a sign of impoverishment of the Etruscan ruling class? The games must have cost a lot; maintaining a troupe of athletes was surely onerous for Etruscan aristocrats. In less favorable economic

conditions, it is possible that the organization of games, particularly those paid for by individual families, became much rarer. But the spirit of the Etruscan games did not die; it passed gradually to the Romans. Roman spectacle is the true heir of Etruscan sport.

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NOTES

- 1 All dates in the remainder of this essay are BCE unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 The relevant objects include, but are by no means limited to, a bucchero vase from Veii (c.630) with a representation of two boxers (Thuillier 1985: 57–65; Sannibale 2004: fig. 1) and two bronze statuettes from Murlo (c.600) showing a wrestler and a referee (Thuillier 1985: 70–7; Warden 1982; Sannibale 2004: fig. 4).
- 3 These slabs show three jockeys, dressed in cloaks and pointed hats, riding galloping horses bareback. The prize, a bronze cauldron, is placed on top of a column. For a detailed stylistic analysis of this plaque, see Root 1973.
- 4 On Etruscan tombs in general, see Brendel 1995: 43–8. For detailed analysis of the Tarquinian tombs, see Steingraber 1986 and 2006.
- 5 On the relatively elevated status of Etruscan women, see Haynes 2000: 125–6, 133, 255–9.
- 6 The production at Chiusi of *cippi*, rectangular bases decorated with low reliefs, carved in the local limestone, started some time after the middle of the sixth century. The bulk of the material belongs to the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods, approximately between 520 and 470. The production died out some time after the middle of the fifth century (Jannot 1984; Brendel 1995: 116, 179, 207–12).
- 7 Fewer than twenty painted tombs have been discovered so far in the territory of Chiusi, most of them dating to the first half of the fifth century. It seems likely that they were decorated by Tarquinian workshops, and offer above all images of funerary rituals (banquets,

dances, and games). On Chiusi painted tombs, see also Rastrelli 2000.

8 On Etruscan boxing, see Thuillier 1985: 179–268. Thuillier (1985: 208–53) considers a number of different explanations for the regular association of flute players and boxers in Etruscan art.

9 On equestrian competitions in Etruria, see Bronson 1965 and Thuillier 1985: 81–110.

10 On Etruscan wrestling, see Thuillier 1985: 269–87.

11 On the Etruscan pentathlon, including details of the individual events included in the pentathlon, see Thuillier 1985: 269–328.

12 This practice is similar but not identical to the infibulation known from the Greek world, see Thuillier 1985: 374–8. It is illustrated with particular clarity in the Tomb of the Monkey at Chiusi (Brendel 1995: 274–7; Steingraber 1986: 273–4).

13 Sannibale (2012: 127) has argued that – at least in the Tomba delle Iscrizioni at Tarquinia – the knights are members of the same aristocratic *gens* that built the tomb. Etruscan tombs have yielded a huge quantity of Panathenaic amphorae (on which see Chapter 5 in this volume). There is, however, no reason to believe that the persons buried in these tombs won these vases as prizes for competing in the Panathenaic Games at Athens; the vases are simply imported luxuries from Greece, just like many other items found in Etruscan cemeteries (Moretti 2003: 17–19; Sannibale 2012: 126).

14 The terracotta plaques depicting images of games found in Murlo may attest to another type of games not connected with funerary rites. They might record celebrative ceremonies held in princely residences. “The overlord, the *dominus*, of Murlo might have summoned on a regular basis – or even for exceptional events – his clients . . . to partake to festivals of a different kind [than funerary]” (Thuillier 1985: 434).

15 On this passage in Herodotus, see Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella 2007: 187–8.

16 On the Etruscan League, see Haynes 2000: 135–7.

17 On the Rescritto di Spello, see Coarelli 2001.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The body of modern scholarship on Etruscan sport is not nearly as extensive as that on Greek sport, but much fine work has been done. The most comprehensive study remains Thuillier 1985, to which this essay is greatly indebted. Thuillier (1985: 119–75) provides a complete catalog of all the relevant iconographic sources with full bibliography for each source. See also Thuillier 1981, 1989a and b, 1990, 1997, 2001, and 2010, all shorter pieces that deal with more specialized questions regarding Etruscan sport. Another sizeable and important study can be found in Gori 1986 (cf. Gori 1986/7).

On Etruscan history, see Haynes 2000. Pallottino 1975, although somewhat out of date, remains helpful. On Etruscan civilization in general, see Torelli 2000 and Barker and Rasmussen 1998. On the daily life of the Etruscans, see Heurgon 1964 or Bonfante 1986. Stoddart 2009 is a basic but useful dictionary of Etruscan civilization. On the archaeological evidence for Etruscan society and history, see Izzet 2007. On Etruscan religion, see Jannot 2005. Introductions to Etruscan art can be found in Borrelli 2004 and Spivey 1997, cf. Torelli 2000, which includes numerous photographs. On Etruscan wall painting in general and the tombs at Tarquinia, perhaps the single most important source for Etruscan sport, see Steingraber 1986 and 2006. On grave markers from Chiusi, see Jannot 1984; on tomb paintings from Chiusi, see the relevant sections in Borrelli 2004 and Steingraber 1986 and 2006. On the reasons why sport scenes were included in Etruscan tomb paintings, see D'Agostino 1989. Sannibale 2004 contains a detailed review of the iconographic evidence for Etruscan sport, along with a perhaps too credulous analysis of that evidence. See also now Sannibale 2012.

On the dress of Etruscan athletes, see Bonfante 2000; McDonnell 1993; and Shapiro 2000. The "Phersu game" has been much discussed. Some, but by no means all, of the relevant scholarship includes Avramidou 2009; Futrell 1997:14–16; Jannot 1993; Plass 1995: 57–8; Rebuffat-Emmanuel 1983; Thuillier 1985: 338–40, 587–90; van der Mere 1982; and Ville 1981: 2–6.

CHAPTER 27

Writing Arenas

Roman Authors and Their Games

Zara Martirosova Torlone

1 Introduction

Roman sport and spectacle regularly find their way into modern literature and film. From Henrik Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis* and Steven Saylor's novels to *Ben Hur*, *Gladiator*, HBO's *Rome*, and Starz's recent *Spartacus*, we are inundated by written and visual representations of the Romans' seemingly insatiable thirst for blood. But did Roman authors view sport and spectacle in the same way that they are treated in modern sources?

The most immediately familiar Roman judgment on sport and spectacle is the phrase coined by Juvenal (c.55–127 CE), *panem et circenses* ("bread handouts and circus games," *Satires* 10.81). Juvenal's bitter contempt for his contemporaries' love of sport and spectacle still resonates because, despite our pervasive interest in Roman blood sports, there is a strong desire among many moderns to believe that the Romans were horrified by the cruelty of gladiatorial games, public executions, and staged animal hunts. Yet the attitude of Roman authors toward their most (in)famous pastimes is far more complex than merely a negative reaction (on ancient critics of Roman sport and spectacle, see Chapter 41 in this volume). The present essay looks at some of the most celebrated literary works from Roman antiquity that reveal the Romans' own complicated experiences with and attitudes toward their sport and spectacle, and it also considers what those works can tell us about Roman self-conceptions and identities.

Before proceeding, a few notes on boundaries and limitations are

in order. Because of its limited length this essay does not attempt to address all the extant Roman texts that reference sport and spectacle. It focuses instead on the most well-known authors and does not, for example, examine graffiti, curse tablets, and various other epigraphic materials. The work of the authors considered here for the most part presents the point of view of the wealthy elite, not the common man. The focus throughout is on the Romans' attitudes to sport and spectacle in general terms, a helpful simplification that nonetheless elides a certain amount of variation in Romans' understandings of individual events or specific occasions.

2 Genres and Roman Attitudes toward Entertainments

In order to understand the portrayal of sport and spectacle in Roman literature, it is necessary to give some thought to literary genres and to Roman attitudes toward entertainments of all kinds and toward the past. Roman authors drew careful distinctions between different kinds, or genres, of literature and paid close attention to literary traditions, both those they inherited from the Greeks and those they created for themselves. Certain ideas and perspectives were felt to be appropriate to certain genres, and a Roman author interested in exploring a particular subject typically selected a genre whose traditional form best reflected his intentions. It is, therefore, crucial to give due consideration to the context that frames authorial attitudes toward sport and spectacle.¹

This essay puts the relevant texts under two broad headings. One consists of “serious” genres such as history, epic poetry, philosophical dialogue, panegyric speeches, and formal letters. Works in these genres typically use sport and spectacle as a didactic tool and as a means to define and contemplate evolving and changing Roman political and social identities. The other heading consists of the “lighter” genres such as love elegy, the so-called Roman novel, satire, and epigram, which focus on the salacious and scandalous aspects of sport and spectacle. This classification by no means implies that there is no overlap between these texts in regard to the way that literary representation manipulates the audience's self-perception. Moreover, the attitude of writers working in the “serious” genres is complicated by their at times ambivalent view of sport and spectacle as unworthy of any kind of reaction. For example, in Tacitus's opinion such things as the building of amphitheaters or the regulation of the gladiatorial

shows were too inconsequential to merit inclusion in historical writing (*Annals* 13.31.1, 13.49.1). Yet, despite such stern assertions, sport and spectacle found their way into all genres of Roman literature.

Romans had a deeply ambivalent attitude toward pleasures of all kinds, including sport and spectacle. Romans referred to sports and spectacles as *ludi* and *spectacula*, respectively.² Both were, like other forms of entertainment, seen as part of a broader category of activities that the Romans called *voluptates*, a word that designates any kind of pleasure (Wistrand 1992: 11; see Chapter 30). Roman writers evinced an enduring concern about the psychological effect of indulging in *voluptates*, including, for example, the effects of watching spectacles. There is no precise equivalent in English for *voluptates*, but “pleasures,” with its connotations of delights that are potentially morally harmful, gets the general flavor right.

Many Romans had a particular concern that *voluptates* would erode two of the most essential traits of the ideal Roman male, *virtus* (“manliness”) and *pietas* (“devotion to duty, loyalty”). Indeed, according to Stoicism, the dominant philosophical school in Rome for much of its history, *voluptates* stood in direct opposition to *virtus* and *pietas* (Wistrand 1992: 61). It is also important to keep in mind that by the first century BCE many Romans saw the period stretching from Rome’s founding to the end of the Second Carthaginian War (753–201 BCE) as the good old days, a time when *virtus* and *pietas* reigned supreme and when a simple, rustic lifestyle permitted few if any *voluptates*. This past was more of a nostalgic construction than a reflection of reality, but it had a firm grip on the Roman imagination.

Some authors working in the “serious” genres resolved the notional opposition between *voluptates* on the one hand and *virtus* and *pietas* on the other by portraying *ludi* and *spectacula* as expressing an aggressive form of masculinity that served the interests of the Roman state. In the first book of his *Early History of Rome (Ab Urbe Condita)*, the Roman historian Livy (59 BCE–17 CE) offers an account of an event from Rome’s earliest days, when a lack of suitable women to marry threatened the city’s very existence. The city’s founder and ruler, Romulus, invites a neighboring group of people, the Sabines, to Rome to attend the Consualia, a religious festival in honor of the god Consus (more commonly known as Neptune). This festival included chariot races and celebrated Neptune as the patron of the horse. These particular games end badly for the Sabines, whose women are kidnapped and become at first unwilling and then later loyal wives and mothers of the first Romans (1.9).

What is especially important in Livy’s account is the connection he makes between games on the one hand and the origins of Roman identity and its most defining concepts of *virtus* and *pietas* on the

other. Livy's main interest in the humble beginnings of Rome was the *mores maiorum* ("the customs of our ancestors"). According to Livy, those customs were originally austere but had in his time degenerated into corruption and an insatiable desire for luxury. The ultimate goal of the kidnapping of the Sabine women at the first Roman games was not the actual act of violence but the honorable desire for the perpetuation of Rome. The first Romans used *ludi* and *spectacula* to claim what they coveted and needed but could not obtain through peaceful negotiations. Although Livy nowhere unconditionally celebrates Roman achievements, he also never dwells on why a religious festival should end in the abduction and rape of the females among the invited guests. But it is clear that he, as a historian, was interested in the origins of the Roman penchant for violent behavior, which was presented in this case as necessary. The Romans' competitive and aggressive spirit that manifested itself in the games transmuted into an act of violence toward their own neighbors. Despite that violence, Livy presents these early games as an expression of Roman masculinity and devotion to duty – *virtus* and *pietas*.

The event described by Livy, the rape of the Sabine women in the aftermath of the games held in honor of the god Consus, was understood very differently by Roman authors who worked in the lighter genres and celebrated the games as an experience brimming with sexual license. Ovid (43 BCE–18 CE) describes this event in his playful *Ars Amatoria* (*Art of Love*), which was written about the same time as Livy's *Early History of Rome*. "You first, Romulus," Ovid states, "made the games disturbed, when the rape of Sabine women consoled the wifeless men" (1.101–2).³ Ovid, like Livy, does not criticize the act of violence, but his approval of it is rooted not in its manifestation of *virtus* and *pietas* but in its overtly sexual component: "Romulus, you alone knew how to provide your soldiers with rewards. If you were to give them to me, I would become a soldier" (1.131–2).

Ovid represents the *ludi* and *spectacula* of both the past and present as occasions made memorable by the (primarily sexual) delights they brought with them. Elsewhere in *Ars Amatoria* he advises his readers that the large crowds that attended chariot races were an ideal place to find sexual partners: "Do not let the races escape your attention, the spacious Circus provides many opportunities" (1.135–6). For Ovid, as Plass pithily observes, the circus games presented "the ambience of sexual excitement dating back to the rape of the Sabine women" (Plass 1995: 31).⁴

The genre of the *Ars Amatoria*, love elegy, hardly allowed for Livian moralizing images of the past as paradigms of true Roman character and ruminations on the loss of *mores maiorum*. By Ovid's time Roman love elegy took the form of what Veyne referred to as

“false confidences” (Veyne 1988: 50) that detailed the male protagonist’s overwhelming desire for, and endless difficulties with, a female lover and his concomitant neglect of his civic duties. (The protagonist in these poems almost always temptingly but deceivingly resembles the poet himself.) Roman love elegy thus featured men who not only had surrendered to *voluptates* but allowed themselves to be enslaved by them and showed minimal concern for traditional *pietas*. Indeed, like his elegiac hero, Ovid, at least in the early stages of his poetic career, had little interest in the religious origins of the Roman games and even less interest in the primitive rituals of his ancestors. His focus was *cultus*, the newly found refinement and sophistication of the Augustan Age. Images of rustic and unkempt Sabine women probably repulsed the self-proclaimed *praeceptor amoris* (“advisor on love”). If anything, the genre of love elegy called for a rebellion against the “established values of tradition” by transferring them into the world of coy didacticism where the most revered concepts of the old days were completely inverted (Conte 1994: 323).

3 The “Serious” Genres

Livy and Ovid vividly illustrate the existence of widely varying attitudes toward sport and spectacle among different Roman authors working in different genres. With that fact in mind, we can look at the representation of sport and spectacle in other Roman authors who wrote in other genres. Livy’s perspective on sport and spectacle is echoed in Vergil’s (70–19 BCE) *Aeneid* where Aeneas, whose constant epithet is in fact *pius* (“duty bound”), organizes funeral games on the first anniversary of the death of his father Anchises (5.35–603). These games follow sacrificial offerings and include rowing, footraces, javelin, and boxing. The competitions are described as a true show of youthful Roman *virtus* and *pietas* inspired by dutiful awe toward gods and ancestors.⁵

Cicero (106–43 BCE), another example of a Roman author who wrote “serious” literature touching on sport and spectacle, presented these activities in a positive light based on what he saw as their educational value. Cicero was a prolific writer whose work includes a philosophical dialogue, the *Tusculan Disputations*, which among other things explores and explains Stoic philosophy. While contemplating steadfastness in battle, he lauds gladiators, who, although “ruined men or barbarians,” never disgrace themselves when faced with death. In this manifestation of courage Cicero sees “the force of training, preparation, and habit” (2.41). The practice and perseverance,

violence and aggression required of gladiators are portrayed by Cicero as vivid and instructive manifestations of the warlike temperament required from a Roman man during military campaigns.

The enduring attraction of the idea that the arena was an educational venue is apparent from its appearance, a century after Cicero's death, in the work of Pliny the Younger (61–132 CE). Pliny was especially interested in gladiatorial combats. In a famous panegyric (a formal speech delivered in praise of an individual) of Trajan he extols the emperor for staging a gladiatorial combat because the participants, even though slaves and criminals, displayed contempt for death and desire for victory, both traits closely associated with *virtus* (*Panegyricus* 33.1). The implicit message is that Roman citizens could be made braver by seeing their inferiors displaying courage and that gladiatorial shows therefore had important educational value (Wiedemann 1992: 38).

The reckless bravery in the face of death shown by performers in the arena also fascinated the statesman and philosopher Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE). In the present day Seneca is perhaps best known as the author of a collection of 124 letters that bears the title *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* (*Letters from a Stoic to Lucilius*). These highly elaborate and formal letters were written with an eye to publication, not as informal correspondence with a friend. In one of these letters Seneca indicates his admiration for people who, having been condemned to death in the arena, committed suicide in order to avoid the humiliation of being slain in public (70.20–7). In the same fashion he expresses his fascination with the courage of men pitted against wild animals in the arena (*On Benefits* 2.19.1–2; *On Providence* 2.8, 8.8; *On the Shortness of Life* 13.6; Cagniard 2000: 608). While Seneca's attitude toward gladiatorial combats was occasionally negative (*Epistulae Morales* 95.33), as a Stoic philosopher he was interested in how *virtus* manifested itself in the arena.

Thus, for Cicero, Pliny, and Seneca, among others, gladiatorial combats and animal hunts were morally positive events because they instilled *virtus* in spectators. For Seneca these activities were also an important example of overcoming the irrational fear of death (*Epistulae Morales* 93.12), especially considering that “even the lowest people find courage and dignity when facing it” (*Epistulae Morales* 30.8; Cagniard 2000: 614). Indeed, Seneca regularly watched shows in the arena, a fact that he makes clear in many of his writings without even pretending, like most cultivated aristocrats of his era, that the shows were “vulgar and boring” (Cagniard 2000: 609).

There were, however, limits to these authors' enthusiasm for sport and spectacle. Gladiatorial combat and animal hunts, which involved displays of martial skill against dangerous opponents, met with more

approval than public executions of condemned criminals. Seneca, for example, was extremely concerned with the detrimental moral effect that executions and their senseless cruelty could have on spectators (*On the Shortness of Life* 13.6–7).

It is also important to note that Roman authors never stretched the metaphor of gladiatorial combat as a school of virtue so far as to suggest that it was acceptable for people of high status to appear in the arena. Cornelius Nepos (100–27 BCE), a stalwart supporter of traditional values, asserted that for the Romans, unlike the Greeks, the participation of elite citizens in public performances could bring only *infamia* (“disgrace”) and was in general incompatible with *pietas* (*Lives* pref. 5). Seneca, despite his open admiration for certain spectacles, deplored the choice of a young Roman aristocrat who preferred gladiatorial combats to a military life (*Epistulae Morales* 87.9). Suetonius’s highly negative portrayal of Caligula includes the charge that he appeared in the guise of a gladiator and charioteer (*Caligula* 54.1) and Dio Cassius is reproachful of the emperor Commodus for his pretensions, acted out in private and in public, of being a charioteer, gladiator, and beast hunter (*Roman History* 73.16–21). A certain amount of caution must be exercised in reading these sorts of accounts, which may be based on exaggerations and rumors intended to besmirch the memory of dead and loathed emperors, but such “crimes of status” (Futrell 2006: 159) were frowned upon throughout Roman history.

4 The “Lighter” Genres

Roman authors working in the “lighter” genres frequently focused on the sexual dimensions of sport and spectacle. We have already seen Ovid in his love elegies evincing a positive attitude toward sports and spectacles because of the sexual opportunities they offered. The sexuality that Roman authors linked to sport and spectacle is even more explicitly expressed in Petronius’s (c.10–66 CE) *Satyricon*, a work that defies simple characterization but is perhaps best known as a novel. Petronius writes with some glee about wealthy women who were sexually aroused by watching gladiators (126). In the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, a collection of biographies of Roman emperors that perhaps dates to the end of the fourth century CE, it is even suggested that Marcus Aurelius’s wife Faustina conceived the future emperor Commodus in an adulterous relationship with a gladiator because only that would explain the latter’s obsession with the arena (*Marcus Aurelius Antoninus* 19; Wiedemann 1992: 26).

The characterization of the circus and amphitheater as places for scandalous behavior is most closely associated with Juvenal, who became famous for writing satires, which were typically biting, relatively short poems that addressed problems of personal ethics and social morality. In his misogynistic sixth satire, Juvenal recounts the immorality of a woman named Eppia (ostensibly a senator's wife), who was smitten by the gladiator Sergius and chose him over her family (102–12). He took an even dimmer view of women, especially women from respectable families, who chose to appear in the arena. For Juvenal that kind of shamelessness completely betrayed traditional values and was incompatible with matronly dignity (246–67; see Chapter 32).

Juvenal also expressed disapproval of sport and spectacle on the grounds that they were occasions for the display of extravagance and luxury that put the Roman populace on the ruinous path to decadence. While Ovid juxtaposed the simplicity of the original games to what he portrayed as the luxurious improvements during his own times (*Ars Amatoria* 1.105–8), Juvenal lampooned the extravagant *pompa* (“procession”) that preceded Roman spectacles and that featured the presiding magistrate wearing a “heavy Tyrian [and thus expensive] toga” and a crown and carrying an ivory staff while accompanied by a crowd of trumpeters (*Satires* 10.36–46). Juvenal criticizes the popularity, wealth, and at times decadent lifestyles of successful charioteers such as Lacerta (literally “the lizard”) who, he claims, made as much money as a hundred lawyers (*Satires* 7.105–14). The satirist sees both the sexual license and extravagance he associates with sport and spectacle as the root of moral degradation that eroded Roman *virtus* and *pietas* and made women promiscuous and men unsuitable for military campaigns.

A similar attitude toward the games can be detected in Martial's (c.40–104 CE) epigrams. Epigrams were originally very short poems that were inscribed on monuments such as tombstones and battle memorials to commemorate an occasion such as a death or a funeral. By Martial's time they had developed into a form of literature that treated a wide array of subjects succinctly and elegantly. Roman authors used them to explore the entire range of human experience and frequently as a vehicle for social criticism (Conte 1994: 508). The main characteristic of Martial's epigrams is their “sophisticated wit” rather than “bawdy or scurrilous jokes” (Coleman 2006: xliv). Martial's earliest known work is the *Liber Spectaculorum* (*Book on Spectacles*), which appeared in 80 CE to commemorate the opening of the Colosseum. This is the only surviving piece of Roman literature that concentrates solely on sport and spectacle; roughly thirty poems from it are extant. They contain a certain amount of panegyric of the

emperor Titus (or possibly Domitian); for example in one poem (*Liber Spectaculorum* 17) Martial writes: “Since he is loyal and suppliant the elephant adores you, Caesar, he who only recently ought to have been so feared by the bull. He does it unbidden, with no master teaching him. Believe me, even he senses our god.” Other poems in the collection present brief vignettes from the first set of games held at the Colosseum. One, for instance, describes the combat between the gladiators Priscus and Verus (*Liber Spectaculorum* 31). While Martial frequently describes sport and spectacle in terms that can be read as either neutral or approving, in some later epigrams he presents a direct critique of sport and spectacle. The speaker in one poem complains that he earns only “a hundred coppers a day,” whereas Scorpis, a famous charioteer, walked away from a race with “fifteen heavy bags of gold” (*Epigrams* 10.74).

The genres of satire and epigram as represented respectively by Juvenal and Martial called for sharp criticism of the public spectacles that dominated Roman attention and elevated their participants to the heights of popularity. However, one has to recognize a difference in attitude even between these two seemingly similar genres. Juvenal’s remarks against the ruinous effects that the *voluptates* of the games have on spectators and on the moral fabric of Rome are mostly rancorous and acerbic. His satires adopted an elevated tone not usually characteristic of a genre that had mundane reality as its subject. His at times hyperbolic indignation and invective are prone to distortion because he is resentful of the continuous subversion of traditional Roman values. Overall, Juvenal presents himself as a man offended by the vices of a perverted society in which greed, extravagance, and lust are rewarded and virtue humiliated.

Martial, on the other hand, as Coleman astutely observes, busies himself with “encapsulating the experience of the spectacles for an audience of vicarious spectators” (Coleman 2006: lxxxii). There is even a possibility that Martial’s epigrams in the *Liber Spectaculorum* brought him the approval of the emperor Titus. Martial offered his reading public something distinctly different from Juvenal. His goal was not bitter invective aimed at curing the vices of society. For him the Roman games were but a part of a much larger spectacle of Roman life and an illustration of the most salient aspects of that life. Like Juvenal, Martial is interested in the vices of society and emphasizes the grotesque aspects of the games. But his view and criticism of the overblown popularity of the games during his times are witty rather than bitter since he looks at them more as a detached spectator uninterested in condemnation. In that respect Martial remains faithful to the general tenor of his chosen genre, the epigram, which with its short form and elliptical content always made “a direct

appeal to the reader's powers of intellectual reconstruction, to the need to interpret" (Hunter 1992: 114).

5 Conclusion

It is time now to draw some conclusions from this brief survey of Roman writers' attitudes toward sport and spectacle. Roman writers did not portray chariot races and bloody shows in the arena as harmful to their society. On the contrary, most of them emphasized the positive elements, especially the educational value of the courage displayed in the arena. However, Roman writers also found deplorable some of the same characteristics that many modern spectators deem objectionable: the thirst for violence, the salacious and scandalous aspects associated with the celebrity culture engendered by these games, the deterioration of traditional morality, and the decadent tastes and ways of life fostered by sport and spectacle. Part of that criticism is undoubtedly associated with the fact that the Roman writers discussed in this essay represented the attitude of Rome's educated elite, who may have truly felt or at least feigned disgust for mass entertainment.

But the truth of the matter remains that for all their philosophical musings and haughty disdain, the testimonies show that the writers went to the shows as eagerly as the common people.

The best illustration of that fact is a story related by none other than St Augustine (354–430 CE) who, in accordance with his emerging Christian sensibilities, was horrified by the power of the arena. In his *Confessions*, Augustine's passionate recounting of his conversion to Christianity, he tells a story about his student, Alypius. The latter upon embarking on the study of law in Rome at first detested gladiatorial shows, only to be swept away by the overpowering desire for them after being forcibly dragged into an amphitheater by his friends. This is how Augustine describes Alypius's eventual "conversion" to Rome's bloody pastime (*Confessions* 6.8):

For when he saw that blood, he immediately drank down the savageness; indeed he did not turn away, but fixed his eyes on it; and unknowingly he drank up the Furies; he delighted in the wickedness of the fight and became inebriated with bloodthirsty lust. He was no longer the man who had come there but was one of the crowd to which he had come, indeed a true companion to those who had brought him. What else is there to say? He looked on, he shouted, he was burning with excitement; he took away

with him a madness that enticed him to come back. Augustine's perception of his student's "fall," expressed with such unequivocal immediacy, clearly did not allow for any positive thoughts on the subject. The concept of *virtus* so dear to the pagan Roman writers was far from Augustine's mind. He found the proximity to the crowd and partaking in its frenzy psychologically damaging and nothing less than a loss of his student's soul, which was defiled by the sight of such cruelty. One has to wonder, however, if the writers of Roman antiquity truly felt the same way even when they expressed their revulsion toward the games. Or perhaps like poor Alypius they were shutting their eyes and trying not to look at the arena all the while drinking in its roar and reveling in the irresistible energy of its violence. And if that is so, they were perhaps not much different from some of us.

NOTES

1 König has astutely noted that "extracting" the opinions of individual authors from texts about sports and spectacle can result in a failure "to acknowledge that these texts have any purpose other than the faithful portrayal of athletic techniques and procedures" (2005: 8).

2 The Latin term *ludus* is always used in the plural (*ludi*) when referring to public games.

3 All translations of Latin texts are my own.

4 Ovid treated even the triumph, the ultimate display of Roman military prowess, as a fitting occasion for making advances to the opposite sex (*Ars Amatoria* 1.217–22). Such unsavory advice and the cavalier attitude it reflected may have contributed to his being exiled from Rome by the emperor Augustus.

5 A slightly later Roman epic, the *Thebaid* of Statius (c.45–96 CE), also contains a lengthy description of a set of funeral games. An insightful analysis of the games in the *Thebaid* can be found in Lovatt 2005.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Good introductions to Latin literature as a whole can be found in Conte 1994 and Howatson 1989. There are several source books that

contain translations of most of the key Roman texts on sport and spectacle; among the most recent and comprehensive is Futrell 2006. A detailed study of the sole surviving piece of Roman literature that concentrates solely on sport and spectacle, Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum*, can be found in Coleman 2006.

There are many modern works that examine literary representations of Roman sport and spectacle. König 2005 looks at several literary works from the first through third centuries CE in which sports play an important role: Lucian's *Anacharsis*, Dio Chrysostom's Melankomas orations, Pausanias's *Description of Greece*, Silius Italicus's *Punica*, various treatises from Galen's corpus, and Philostratus's *Gymnastikos*. He explores how different authors used sports to treat issues ranging from what it meant to be Greek to the effects of military conquest on Roman culture and in doing so he offers stimulating, frequently provocative, readings of a number of challenging texts. Wistrand 1992 is especially helpful in exploring the attitude of Roman writers toward games in the first century CE. It offers a detailed but accessible examination of the attitudes of nine writers – Juvenal, Martial, Petronius, Pliny the Younger, Seneca the Younger, Suetonius, Tacitus, Valerius Maximus, and Velleius Paterculus – toward entertainments in the arena, theater, circus, and stadium; and it also provides an exploration of the role of entertainment in Roman society. Roman attitudes toward *voluptates* are also discussed sensitively and at length in Toner 1995.

Articles by Bradley (1981); Cagniard (2000); and Newbold (1975) concentrate on specific Roman authors and their attitudes toward sport and spectacle. Several essays included in Boyle and Dominik 2003 cover literary attitudes toward *ludi* and *spectacula* in Rome in the second half of the first century CE. Especially noteworthy are essays by Hardie, who discusses poetry and politics at the games of Domitian, and by Gunderson, who focuses on several texts that shed light on the function and social significance of the Colosseum. The funeral games in Vergil's *Aeneid* have attracted a great deal of scholarly comment, including Dunkle 2005; Galinsky 1968; Glazewski 1972; and Briggs 1975.

Some scholarly studies of Roman sport and spectacle gravitate toward discussion of their violent nature and of death in the arena. Hope 2007 concentrates on “athletic texts” that present death as entertainment. Edwards 2007 looks at death in the arena and examines representations of gladiators' death in literature. Plass 1995 offers a thorough analysis of arena violence in Rome and excellent insights into its sociology and politics.

CHAPTER 28

Representations of Spectacle and Sport in Roman Art

Steven L. Tuck

1 Introduction

It is not an exaggeration to say that images of spectacle and sport occur in every surviving medium of Roman art: floor mosaics, wall and panel paintings, coins, carved gems, glass vessels, bronze statuettes, stone reliefs, free-standing statues, bone and ivory weapon handles, and terracotta vases, plaques, figurines, and lamps. The imagery of spectacle and sport was literally everywhere.

A case study approach is an attractive way of surveying this mass of material, but it has inherent limits. For example, Pompeii provides a rich array of evidence for the types, placement, and use of the art of spectacle and sport during the 160 years that it was a Roman city. Art of this type is ubiquitous in the city, appearing in a range of places, from the most open public areas, such as the forum, to the most restricted private spaces, such as the small dining rooms of houses. Yet even Pompeii has limitations. For example, excavations at the site have not as yet found any gladiator graves, which were commonly marked with stone reliefs that showed the occupant in the arms and armor he used in the arena. Furthermore, because it was destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, Pompeii lacks any of the second century and later material, notably sarcophagi, on which chariot-racing scenes are commonly found. In addition, Pompeii did not have its own site for chariot racing (a circus), so chariot-racing imagery is certainly underrepresented compared to communities with circuses. Thus, even the best-preserved Roman city does not provide a full range of material that can be analyzed.

We will, therefore, adopt an alternative approach by focusing on subject matter and context; this approach permits a fuller analysis of the use and social function of the art of spectacle and sport. In the Roman arts there are five main subject categories of spectacle and sport imagery: the three major events in the amphitheater (beast hunts, public executions, and gladiatorial combats), chariot races, and Greek sport. Each subject has its own iconography and conventions of representation, but some overall patterns are clear. The presumption of the action images is that of a snapshot of an event, overwhelmingly a specific rather than generic one. Even images that display a single individual carry an illusion of context or narrative and typically celebrate the games and their sponsor rather than the performer or athlete who is the subject of the image. This differs from Greek athletic imagery found in the Panhellenic sanctuaries, where statues of athletes commemorate their victories and personal achievement in games and contests. A Greek sanctuary such as Olympia became filled over time with what amounted to a museum of victorious athletes whereas Roman images of beast hunts, for example, more often act as reminders of the beneficence of the patron of a set of games.

It is essential to pay close attention to the context in which images of spectacle and sport appeared because this had a powerful influence on how they were seen and understood. Scenes of gladiatorial combat and public executions on the walls and floors of elite dining rooms certainly conveyed a different set of values and messages than reliefs on infant sarcophagi showing chariot races – the first example suggested elite beneficence, the second the notion of victory in death. We will, therefore, look at how imagery of spectacle and sport was displayed and functioned in five distinct contexts: sarcophagi, amphitheaters, baths, tombs, and houses.

The survey of subject matter and context undertaken here is not comprehensive because the brevity of this essay necessitates the omission of numerous details and nuances of the massive amount of relevant material. That said, what follows does touch on many of the primary features of the Roman art of spectacle and sport and the relevant interpretive issues.

2 Beast Hunts

Images of beast hunts (*venationes*) fall into two broad categories: those of animals facing each other in the arena and those of professional hunters (*venatores*) battling wild animals. In each case the images are notable for their precise portrayal of particular wild animals. The

animals shown in Roman depictions of *venationes* match the literary and documentary accounts of those that were imported into the arena, sometimes at great expense and loss of life and over long distances (Jennison 1937; Toynbee 1973:17–22; see also Chapter 34 in this volume).

The animal versus animal scenes are generally organized into pairs of fighting animals as often was the case in the actual events. Standard images found repeatedly include a bull and bear chained together, as seen in the Zliten mosaic, which was created in the first century CE as part of the decoration of a Roman villa in what is now Libya (Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000: fig. 83), and in the paintings on the amphitheater at Pompeii (Jacobelli 2003: fig. 50). (For the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay, see [Map 28.1](#).) Another common pairing is a lion or other large cat pursuing or taking down a deer or other ruminant mammal. This also appears on the amphitheater at Pompeii (Jacobelli 2003: fig. 51) as well as on many well-preserved lamps (Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000: fig. 82).

Map 28.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



The straightforward presentation of these scenes apparently recording actual hunts is contradicted by the Pompeian scene since Pompeii's amphitheater was not designed for large cats, and extant announcements of games held in Pompeii do not mention any. (On the Pompeii amphitheater, its decoration, and the events held there, see Jacobelli 2003: 53–64 and the bibliography cited therein.) The amphitheater paintings from Pompeii, like many others, depict a landscape reminiscent of wilderness and are probably intended to evoke the setting in which these animals normally lived rather than to document any re-creation of that setting in the arena. The landscape echoes wall paintings showing idealized hunting grounds, as found in a number of domestic interiors at Pompeii including the House of Octavius Quartio.¹ The images reflect the events in the arena in general, but are ultimately shaped more by the ideology behind

venationes than their realities. The display of wild animals from the borders of the Roman Empire in exotic settings, both in the arena and in art, trumpeted Roman military and cultural power over nature.

Images of professional hunters battling wild animals are more common and more varied than those of paired wild animals. *Venatores* are shown fighting a wide range of dangerous animals including various big cats, bulls, bears, and boars. They are also depicted attacking animals famed for their speed, such as ostriches, deer, and wild asses. In many cases compositions of paired figures predominate. Images that feature groups of animal fighters against a number of animals often highlight the setting in which the encounter takes place; architectural elements, cages, weapons, or auxiliary figures show that the event is a staged set of games in the arena, not a hunt in the wilderness. Developed versions of this are seen on the Zliten mosaic; the Magerius mosaic (see [Figure 42.1](#)), which dates to the middle of the third century CE and comes from a private home in what is now Tunisia (Blanchard-Lemée, Ennaïfer, Slim, *et al.* 1996 (1995): 209–14 and fig. 162; Dunbabin 1978: 67–70 and figs. 52–3; Brown 1992: 198–200; Bomgardner 2009; Fagan 2011: 128–32); and a terracotta plaque of the first century CE from Pompeii (Jacobelli 2003: fig. 14).

Hunters are depicted wearing a variety of types of protective dress and equipment, and some scholars have linked that variety with chronological developments in animal hunting (Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000: 70–2). This seems to be a false impression that springs from the paucity of sources. *Venatores* attacking animals of speed are fairly consistently armed with spears and little or no body armor, whereas those facing big cats are more heavily armed and equipped with body armor. The heaviest armed figures are those facing lions, the largest of all carnivores found in the arena.

As with the animal versus animal scenes, the killing of exotic animals by *venatores* operates as a metaphor for Roman control over nature. In addition, *venationes* supported a narrative of the extension of Roman power into contested areas, with exotic animals symbolizing the inhabitants of the areas of Roman expansion. Accordingly, Romans made concerted attempts to gather animals from the edges of Roman territory for display in Rome and in other urban centers.

3 Public Executions

Scenes of public executions are found almost as often and in many of the same images as those of animal hunting.² (On Roman public executions, see Chapter 35.) By far the most common depictions of

executions show *damnatio ad bestias*, which involved people being exposed to wild animals. Here again the Zliten mosaic features prominently; it shows a number of such scenes, with some individuals driven with whips to waiting animals, while others are tied to small carts and wheeled into the arena to be attacked by leopards (Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000: fig. 83).

Damnatio ad bestias was among the most spectacular methods of execution and was particularly striking when visually represented. This was an important reason for the frequency with which it was depicted. It is not coincidental that public executions became gradually more theatrical during the first two centuries of Rome's rule by emperors (Coleman 1990). The desire for novelty and unprecedented entertainment probably fueled this development and prisoners began to be executed through reenactments of Greek myths such as those of Actaeon, Marsyas, and Prometheus, a trend illustrated on the reliefs that decorated the amphitheater at Capua (Tuck 2007).

Another, equally important reason for the portrayal of public executions in art was that they highlighted the role of the patron of the games as supporter of Roman values, punishing those who transgressed against the Roman system. Patrons provided public, exemplary demonstrations of the enforcement of Roman power and the re-creation of social order through dispatching prisoners, either of war or the penal system. Images of staged executions provided reassurance that the Roman system worked and benefited those inside that system, which included the viewers of executions and of the art depicting them (Brown 1992: 194–7).

4 Gladiatorial Combats

Gladiatorial combat was the most popular subject matter for images of spectacle and sport in ancient Rome. (On gladiatorial combats, see Chapters 25, 31, and 32.) The images are often very conventional representations of action in the arena (Coulston 2009). The most common composition is a pair of gladiators engaged in combat, as seen in a wall painting from the Tomb of Vestorius Priscus at Pompeii (Figure 28.1). The gladiators are almost universally armed and armored in ways that conform to the known categories of gladiators (see Chapter 25), giving these otherwise generic scenes a specificity that was probably important to the patron or audience. The images seem to represent one of three stages in gladiatorial combat: the initial clash with both combatants on their feet facing each other; an intermediate stage when one combatant is disarmed, on the ground,

or facing possible defeat; or the conclusion of a bout with the defeated fighter subdued, wounded and surrendering, or dead.

Figure 28.1 Wall painting of gladiators from the Tomb of Vestorius Priscus at Pompeii, 76 CE. *Source:* Photograph by Steven Tuck. Used with permission.



The addition of names to these paired scenes is common and makes them representations of a particular bout, most often one held in the local arena. Captioning with names occurs in permanent works such as mosaics, reliefs, and paintings, but also in graffiti such as those found at Pompeii where, despite their casual nature, the conventions of more formal images still apply (Jacobelli 2003: fig. 43; Garraffoni and Funari 2009).

Almost as common as combat scenes are images of single gladiators standing as though preparing for or having just completed a match. These images seem to carry no narrative and provide our best evidence of the purely decorative use of gladiators in Roman art. With

the exception of gravestones for gladiators, the standing individuals are not named and the images do not operate as souvenirs of famous gladiators or particular events. As generic images of gladiators they demonstrate the ubiquity of gladiatorial imagery in Roman art; even stripped of any context or apparent reference to real events, depictions of gladiators were immensely popular (Coulston 2009).

5 Chariot Races

The second most popular subject matter for images of spectacle and sport in ancient Rome was chariot racing (Humphrey 1986: 176–254). (On chariot racing, see Chapter 33.) Circuses accommodated much larger numbers of spectators than amphitheaters and chariot racing had an immense number of ardent fans, so an expansive audience for the art of chariot racing was almost guaranteed. The relevant depictions fall into two major categories: what might be thought of as portraits (i.e., images of single charioteers or horses) and action scenes. Within these categories, however, there is a remarkable range of conventional imagery that demonstrates the allure of chariot racing for the Roman audience.

The individual images are generally victory portraits of a winning charioteer, horse, or team of horses. These occasionally have captions or names attached, but they often just convey the iconography of victory through a palm branch (Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000: fig. 101, 103). The action scenes predominately illustrate the most dramatic moments in a chariot race: the victory ceremony; accidents; and, most commonly, teams negotiating a turn. Chariots rounding turning posts offered an excellent opportunity for depicting the architectural detail and decorative features of the circus, notably the *spina* (the central divider of the track), as well as a moment of intense competition and risk. Unlike any of the other spectacle or sport subjects in Roman art, circus imagery became a powerful metaphor for life (Koortbojian 1995: 127–42).

6 Greek Sport

The iconography of athletic images in Roman art is similar to that of gladiatorial scenes but with additional cultural references to the Greek nature and origins of athletics (Newby 2005). The relevant depictions typically show either vignettes of athletic activity and competition or

images of single athletes. The combat events of boxing, wrestling, and *pankration* are the sports most often represented, with the standard composition showing pairs of competitors actively contesting a bout. These are also the Greek sports most often presented as spectacular, as opposed to participatory, activities in the Roman world, indicating that their portrayal might evoke patronage, as did many gladiatorial displays. It seems likely that the imagery of pairs of boxers, wrestlers, or pankratiasts was intended for the consumption of those who watched such activities rather than those who participated in them.

The opposite might be the case for images of single athletes or of athletic groups exercising or standing in a gymnasium, as found on a large-scale mosaic from Ostia (see [Figure 28.2](#)). In these instances the imagery seems evocative and perhaps designed to reinforce or at least represent the ideal of behavior in a particular context, for example in the exercise area of a bath complex.³

Figure 28.2 Mosaic from the Porta Marina Baths in Ostia showing athletes, second century CE. *Source:* Photograph by Steven Tuck. Used with permission.



7 The Importance of Context

For the Romans, themes and meaning in sport imagery clearly derive

from the combination of image and context. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is found in the category of child sarcophagi that depict chariot races. These are a product of the explosive growth of inhumation that began to dominate Roman burial practice in the second quarter of the second century CE.

One such sarcophagus (see [Figure 28.3](#)) provides a superb case study in the use and meaning of sport images, here with chariot racing as a metaphor for life and the denial of the power of death (D'Ambra 2007: 345). This sarcophagus has a relief with a representation of a chariot race in a circus. The setting is indicated by many detailed decorations from the *spina*, including columns, an obelisk, the turning posts, and lap markers (shaped like eggs). An accident, a common occurrence in races, is also shown. The depth and three-dimensional carving allow for the depiction of chariots on both sides of the track. The major variance from real racing is the use of Cupids or Erotes as charioteers, a common feature of chariot-racing scenes on children's sarcophagi and presumably considered appropriate given the nature of the occupant (D'Ambra 2007: 340–5; Bell 2003).

Some of the scenes and motifs are apparently metaphors for life, even without an explicitly victorious charioteer (which is a frequent component of this type of relief, but which is missing here). Images on Roman sarcophagi such as Victory personified and chariot races are symbols of life and its successful conclusion. This may seem curious in cases of premature death, as in this child's sarcophagus, but here the emphasis is on the quality of the life lived, the race run perhaps, rather than its quantity, and on the eternal display of that life by perpetually youthful figures. The same notion suffuses the epitaphs of children who are praised with qualities and virtues that may seem disproportionate to their young ages.

Figure 28.3 Front panel from a marble sarcophagus for a child showing chariot race with Erotes as charioteers, c.190–220 CE. *Source:* Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri (83.65): Silver anniversary gift of the UMC Development Fund Board and the Boone County Community Trust.



8 Public Contexts:

Amphitheaters and Baths

Complex uses of spectacle imagery appear in many other areas throughout the Roman world. In public spaces and buildings this art is clearly intended to evoke, reflect, and extend the use of space, the messages of the spectacles, and the notions of imperial and local political beneficence and social standing that were closely associated with spectacle. To someone walking across the city of Pompeii near the end of its existence the spectacle imagery would be obvious (Kellum 1999). Public spaces held large-scale imagery. The forum on occasion hosted large painted wooden plaques that portrayed participants in games sponsored by local political figures, reinforcing the connection between hosting games and political advancement.

Amphitheaters were particularly important sites for the display of images of spectacle and sport. Capua, Carthage, Pompeii, Puteoli, and Rome all have amphitheaters with informative, if incompletely preserved, decorations that include spectacle and sport imagery (Bomgardner 2000: 61–120). Even given the incomplete nature of the surviving decoration in these buildings, some notable patterns are clear. There is a heavy emphasis on beast hunts and prisoner executions as well as a minority of reliefs showing processions and magistrates in attendance at games. All of the facilities mentioned above had images, generally in relief, of events taking place in and around the arena that were components of a day's games, with the notable exception of images of gladiatorial combat – the main event of arena spectacles. Gladiators are shown, sometimes singly and sometimes in groups, but not gladiatorial bouts or action scenes. Such scenes probably evoke the types of entertainment to be presented rather than records of specific games.

Capua provides many of the best examples of these types of imagery in its preserved interior relief sculpture (Tuck 2007). One relief ([Figure 28.4](#)) shows a reenactment of the Calydonian boar hunt taking place. Here the mythological figures are framed by a doorway that matches the architecture of the amphitheater itself, a feature out of place for the original myth and its normal iconography. The amphitheater at Capua was in fact decorated with many images of executions staged as Greek myths as well as scenes of presiding magistrates and of the procession (*pompa*) with which a day of games began.

Figure 28.4 Marble relief from the amphitheater at Capua showing reenactment of the Calydonian boar hunt, second centuryCE. *Source:*



The best-preserved images of gladiators from any arena were the paintings from the podium wall at Pompeii's amphitheater (Jacobelli 2003: fig. 49). Those paintings showed a pair of gladiators who were arming themselves with helmets, swords, and shields and who thus appear to be in the final stages of preparation just prior to combat.

The theme in these and similar decorative programs is one of reinforcement of Roman power. Those elements that threaten the Roman system, be they wild animals, criminals, or prisoners of war, are subdued and inevitably defeated in spectacular entertainments. Gladiatorial combats do not clearly and necessarily support this narrative and so their combats are not portrayed. A duel between gladiators and the defeat or victory of one or the other of the combatants would not convey any greater lessons about the superiority of the Roman system to the spectators than the mere presence of the images does.

Public bathing complexes were another important venue for the display of images of spectacle and sport. At Ostia the Bath of the Seven Sages has wall paintings of chariot racing, a very unusual motif for that setting. Far more common are images of athletes, who exercised, trained, and perhaps competed in these complexes (Newby 2005: 45–87). The so-called Samnite palaestra at Pompeii had an athletic statue, and mosaics are commonly found in second- and third-century CE facilities such as the Baths of Caracalla in Rome and the Maritime Baths and Baths of the Porta Marina at Ostia.

The large black and white floor mosaic from the Porta Marina bath (Figure 28.2) shows a full range of athletic figures (Newby 2005: 51–6). The centerpiece of the mosaic is a table with prizes for athletic competitions, including a decorated crown and a palm branch. To the right of the table is a herm with another palm branch and a hoop and short stick with a curved end, used to steer the hoop.⁴ In front of the table, from left to right, are a metal bowl on a high foot, a leather

ball, a vessel with a handle (probably for oil), and a ring with three strigils (used to scrape oil and dirt off the skin after exercise). Below the table two boxers are depicted; the one to the left, raising both arms, has won. To the right of the boxers is a referee. To the right of the table is an athlete holding weights. Above the table are four athletes. The first is carrying a ring to which two strigils and a vessel holding oil are attached. The second one also carries a strigil. To the left are two wrestlers. Finally, to the left of the table is a discus thrower with his left arm raised, perhaps indicating victory. To his right is a trumpeter.

The variety of athletes and the emphasis on prizes and victors indicates competition as the major theme here, which is not to say that this mosaic, or many similar ones, necessarily represents athletic spectacle. It may be designed to evoke the use of this space for sport and recreation by everyday users of the bath. In this way it may operate in a way similar to arena decoration, which extends the use of the space in those buildings with thematic decoration recognizable to the spectators as representing appropriate activities. This differs from mosaics of famous athletes such as one showing two renowned athletes of the third century CE, Helix and Alexander. Versions of this mosaic have been found in a tavern at Pompeii and in a building on the Bay of Naples. In this case athletic imagery celebrates well-known individuals (Jones 1998) rather than suggesting that the spaces in question were intended for athletic training.

9 Between Public and Private: Tombs

Tombs, private monuments displayed in the overtly public setting of cemeteries, were another important site for the display of imagery of spectacle and sport, and here again context proves to be critical in interpreting the social meaning of the imagery. Two well-preserved tombs for sponsors of games, the Tomb of C. Lusius Storax at Teate Marrucinum (modern-day Chieti in Italy) and the Tomb of Vestorius Priscus at Pompeii, provide superb evidence of the use and meaning of spectacle images on tomb monuments.

Storax, who died c.40 CE, was buried in an expensive tomb with multiple registers of relief decoration portraying games that he put on in Teate (Clarke 2003: 145–52; Papini 2004: 138–46). The two most important elements are a long frieze of 10 pairs of gladiators (a standard number for a set of local games) in combat and above it a

pediment containing a triangular relief with Storax seated in the stands presiding over the games. The two scenes are on separate registers but integrated by the gladiators, some of whom look up to Storax for his decision on whether they are to be granted *missio* at the conclusion of their bouts. (On *missio*, see Chapter 25.) Storax is seated in the center of the pediment and is the largest figure there. The theme of his glorification is sustained by the lower level magistrates who surround him and the attendants, including musicians, who fill out the corners of the pediment. Attention is further concentrated on Storax by imagery of the presentation of a petition, a common occurrence during games. The attention focused on Storax by both performers and spectators highlights his role as patron of the games and the political and social benefits of hosting a set of games for a small town magistrate and his family. It also demonstrates exactly the power of such representations in perpetuating such benefits. Here the literal petrification of the event indicates its status as the major defining image of Storax's life.

The Tomb of Vestorius Priscus, who was buried outside the Vesuvian Gate at Pompeii in 75/6 CE, echoes the theme of personal aggrandizement found on the Tomb of Storax but with a more extensive set of painted images that contextualize the images of arena spectacle (Clarke 2003: 187–203; for a more detailed analysis see Mols and Moormann 1994). The images in the central panels on the inner surfaces of the enclosure walls of the tomb show a range of high status iconography designed to represent the identity of the deceased as an important man in Pompeii, an identity defined by his public service and connections.

There are six major panels, which feature the following depictions: (1) a large silver table service of the type found on display in the dining rooms of expensive homes, (2) a high status banquet or symposium, (3) a pair of gladiators ([Figure 28.1](#)), (4) Vestorius Priscus standing in the *tablinum* of his house (the room where he would receive dependents), (5) Priscus seated and surrounded by attentive listeners, and (6) a walled park (*paradeisos*) where wild animal hunts took place.

Three of these images are domestic and focus on Priscus's role as a host, receiving dependents and welcoming guests, whereas the silver service establishes his pretensions to high status domestic display. The outdoor scenes of Priscus and an audience and the *paradeisos* are linked by the pair of gladiators. The gladiators probably represent one component of a set of games he hosted as aedile (a civic official) at Pompeii, most likely in the year he died. That panel shows the connections between local elites and the games that they sponsored, and demonstrates the close ties between their games and personal

identity. Hosting games was as important for a Roman politician as hosting dinners and receiving clients. The use of spectacle imagery in the domestic sphere also reinforces its critical role in projecting personal values and identity.

10 Private Contexts: Houses

Yet another significant site for the display of imagery of sport and spectacle was the private setting of the house. It is, however, important to bear in mind that, as is clear from his tomb, elites such as Vestorius Priscus regularly received substantial numbers of visitors at their houses, which were thus more than purely private spaces. The expectation of visitors must in some cases at least have influenced choices of decorative program.

The House of the Tragic Poet at Pompeii provides insight into class distinctions in representations of spectacle and sport. Scenes from Greek mythology are standard for Roman houses of the second quarter of the first century CE at Pompeii, and the paintings that fill the central panels in the main entranceway (*atrium*) of the House of the Tragic Poet concentrate on the Trojan War. The dining room (*triclinium*) in the rear of the house, however, also has paintings of gladiators (Bergmann 1994; Pappalardo 2009: 178–89). This is the only excavated and recorded house at Pompeii with such spectacle images in the dining space. This is an especially notable instance because depicting gladiators in domestic interiors inspires mocking in a passage in Petronius's *Satyricon* (30) in which the speaker denigrates just this sort of interior decoration in the home of a freedman in southern Italy, probably somewhere on the Bay of Naples, on which Pompeii was located.

When we look to parts of the Roman world other than Italy we find that gladiators and other arena spectacles commonly form a major component of domestic display in Roman Africa, as the famous Zliten mosaic exemplifies. The large Roman villa at Zliten, near the coast in the province of Africa Tripolitania in North Africa, has a mosaic floor dated to the late first century CE, making it among the earliest mosaics of Roman Africa (Aurigemma 1926: 13–201, fig. 77, pl. D; Brown 1992: 194–6; Dunbabin 1978: 17–18, 66, 109, figs. 46–9; Dunbabin 1999: 119–21; Parrish 1985). The floor is a large square, with each side being 3.53 meters in length. Its center consists of 16 alternating squares laid in rows of four. Small mosaic roundels of varieties of fish and shellfish within square frames alternate with high-quality square panels containing geometric patterns.

Along the outside is a figural border with scenes of events in a day of arena games, all on a white ground. Clearly identifiable are *venationes* featuring deer and ostriches, executions, and – unusually even for Roman Africa – many gladiators, along with the musicians and the arena attendants known from other arena images and literary accounts. The gladiators take up two sides of the border and are clearly the major performers of the day, with very precise representation of the types of gladiators, pairing of combatants, and circumstances of their refereed bouts.

The prisoners in the mosaic are being executed by *damnatio ad bestias*. Two are bound to stakes mounted on little carts pushed by attendants toward leopards, while another is driven by whip blows toward an attacking lion. The prisoners look remarkably similar in height, skin tone, and hairstyle to some of the individuals depicted as supervising their execution. They are figures from the region, generally thought to be Garamantes, people of the southern edge of Roman territory along the Sahara.

The details of specific events and pairings of gladiators lead to the conclusion that this mosaic illustrates a specific set of games, probably in the amphitheater of Lepcis Magna a short distance away from the villa, and almost certainly sponsored by the owner of the villa, who commissioned this mosaic as a record of his beneficence. In contrast to other provinces where they are very rare, many arena and spectacle mosaics are found in Roman Africa. Here the context is different from the spectacle images found on the tombs of local elites in Italy, but the meaning is the same. The owner of the villa hosted games and made the representation of that event the central decorative feature of his major reception room, probably a *triclinium*. His guests would all recognize the theme of beneficence, which reinforced his public position in the community.

11 Conclusion

Representations of spectacle and sport replicate the complex roles they played in the Roman world. The power of spectacle and sport is reflected in the use of arena images to aggrandize local elites, to create or reinforce social and political connections, and to demonstrate the power of Rome in defeating criminals, barbarians, and nature, whether displayed on tombs or the walls of taverns or houses. The imagery of chariot racing extends the reception of this entertainment and its typical imperial patronage while adapting to the metaphor of triumph after death, as seen on sarcophagi. These

victorious images echo those of athletes and provide insights into Roman attitudes on achievement, victory, and social status.

NOTES

1 This edifice is sometimes also designated as the House of Loreius Tiburtinus. On this house and its decoration, see Clarke 1991: 193–207 and Guzzo and d'Ambrosio 1998: 95–9.

2 No images survive of staged mass sea battles (*naumachiae*) or of the aquatic shows sponsored by some emperors at Rome that featured trained animals (Coleman 1993). Perhaps these were impossible to illustrate effectively, or perhaps such images had no appreciable audience. The principals in *naumachiae* were all prisoners of war, so those who followed animal hunters and gladiators might not have been interested. Also, since emperors sponsored such shows, private patrons were unlikely to commission images of such scenes.

3 This differs from statues in Greek sanctuaries that evoke the prizes and celebrate the achievements of specific, named athletes as a component of religious festivals. Athletic imagery in the Roman world was often in a secondary context, having been plundered from Greek sites or copied from Greek originals, and selected to be appropriate for a space without historic or celebratory function (Bartman 1991).

4 Herms were statues, with stubs for arms, that were originally understood as depictions of Hermes, a patron deity of athletes. Over the course of time the basic sculptural form took on a broader range of uses and meanings. The pastime of hoop rolling remained popular until the advent of motor vehicles in the early twentieth century CE.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The biggest difficulty in studying representations of spectacle and sport is finding them. No corpus of all images exists, not even for any one of the sports. The most complete, for gladiators, is Teyssier's 2009 book with its list of 1,535 images cross-indexed to artistic media. The catalog of the *Gladiators and Caesars* exhibition (Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000) provides a range of images from each category of sport and spectacular entertainment along with important interpretive essays on gladiators, athletes, chariot racing, and the use and meaning of these images. Most sports are discussed in one or two interpretive articles that explore the material by subject. Bergmann 2008 collects and analyzes circus and chariot racing imagery while Newby 2005 does the same for Greek sport in the Roman world. Coulston 2009 argues that images of gladiators sometimes served erotic, comedic, or apotropaic purposes.

Pompeii is understandably prominent in studies. There are several good, concise works that offer an introduction to the site and its history; see, for instance, Guzzo and D'Ambrosio 1998 or Ling 2005. Jacobelli 2003 collects and analyzes the display of gladiator and arena imagery at Pompeii. Garraffoni and Funari 2009 concentrate on gladiatorial graffiti at Pompeii. Clarke 2003 likewise engages the material from Pompeii but with more analysis that contextualizes spectacle imagery within domestic, commercial, or tomb display. His work is limited to case studies of specific examples, largely at Pompeii, but it provides astute observations and conclusions.

For a well-illustrated study of the architecture, art, and history of the "Colosseum" or Flavian Amphitheater in Rome, see Gabucci 2001. Bomgardner 2000 publishes the evidence for decorative programs of some of the best-preserved and most important extant amphitheatres,

with discussions of the rationale behind the images found. Tuck 2007 argues that the reliefs from the amphitheater at Capua represent mythological reenactments in the arena otherwise found only in literature (see Coleman 1990).

Scenes of spectacle and sport in mosaics from Roman North Africa have attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention. See, for instance, Dunbabin 1978: 65–108 and Blanchard-Lemée, Ennaïfer, Slim, *et al.* 1996 (1995): 189–218.

Some articles use single sites or pieces to draw broader conclusions about spectacle imagery. For example, Bomgardner 2009 examines the Magerius mosaic and issues of depicted patronage, arena action, and crowd interaction. Other studies tackle a particular type or context of art; see, for example, the work of Bell 2003 and D'Ambra 2007 on spectacular iconography in funerary contexts.

The reading of the Roman art of spectacle and sport proposed here builds on a significant body of scholarship on the social history of Roman spectacle. See, in particular, Hopkins 1983: 1–30; Beacham 1999; Potter 2010; and Wiedemann 1992.

CHAPTER 29

Material Evidence for Roman Spectacle and Sport

Gregory S. Aldrete

1 Introduction

What can material evidence tell us about ancient sport and spectacle that literary accounts and artistic images cannot? As a simple thought experiment, pretend that you could pick up one of the near-perfectly preserved 2,000-year-old gladiator helmets that have been found at Pompeii and place it over your head (see [Figure 29.1](#)). Imagine the disorienting way in which your vision would be fragmented and restricted by having to peer through tiny holes in the mesh covering your face. Consider how sounds and voices would be muffled and distorted within the hemisphere of bronze enclosing your head. Feel the solid weight of the helmet bearing down on your neck and shoulders, making every movement clumsy and exaggerated, and the sharp, acrid smells of bronze and your own sweat filling your nostrils. Admittedly, the insights to be gained from such an experiment are relatively minor – we can capture one tiny aspect of the physical experience of being a gladiator, specifically how one's helmet restricted one's senses, and from this we can perhaps extrapolate other information, such as the effects this might have had on fighting techniques.

Nevertheless, this fragment of sensory experience, trivial as it might seem, is something that no ancient literary text tells us. Almost all surviving literary and much of the artistic evidence regarding Roman sport and spectacle was produced by and/or intended for the consumption of a tiny group of elites, but these were not the groups that either participated in or, in terms of numbers, constituted the

overwhelming majority of observers at these events. We simply do not have any first-hand written description of what it was like to be a gladiator or a charioteer. Similarly, we lack any accounts whatsoever from the millions of ordinary Romans who constituted the vast majority of spectators. These are huge and troubling voids in our knowledge of ancient sport and spectacle. It is precisely here, however, in this crucial gap of knowledge, that material evidence represents a vital resource that can at least partially begin to recover these missing voices and experiences.

Figure 29.1 Bronze gladiator's helmet from Pompeii, first century CE.
Source: British Museum GR 1946.5–14.1, © Trustees of the British Museum.



One key category of material evidence consists of the surviving objects that were actually used by those who either participated in or observed ancient sport and spectacle. Physical items such as the equipment employed by gladiators, the programs scrutinized by

ancient circus fans, and the regalia carried in triumphal processions can all serve as starting points toward reconstructing not just the literal course of ancient events but, more importantly, the attitudes and experiences of the participants and observers. Another absolutely vital type of material evidence comprises epigraphic sources (inscriptions), notably tombstone epitaphs and graffiti, because it is only through these that we can come close to recapturing the lost voices of those most directly involved in ancient spectacle. Humble cultural objects such as toys, lamps, pots, and flasks are invaluable in assessing societal attitudes toward ancient performers and the place that they held in popular culture and consciousness. Additionally, there are other types of inscriptions and physical evidence, such as official proclamations, laws, and coins, that, while representing a more elite perspective, nevertheless also have much to contribute. Finally, even items such as their bones can reveal surprising insights into both the professional activities and the day-to-day lives of ancient performers. This essay will present a brief overview of some broad categories of material evidence for sport and spectacle in the Roman world and will discuss several particularly notable, recent, or informative examples.¹

2 Objects Used by Participants in and Observers of Roman Sport and Spectacle

In attempting to understand ancient sport and spectacle, items such as the helmet mentioned above are appealing because they appear to offer more visceral and direct access to the experiences of ancient performers than the sort of secondary constructs we find in literature and art. Dozens of gladiatorial helmets in various stages of preservation survive, as well as a variety of other types of body armor, including many greaves and some shoulder guards (see Junkelmann 2000: 161–87). By studying the form and function of these objects and combining this information with visual and textual evidence, we can reconstruct much about the practical aspects of gladiatorial combat.

A natural next step is to fashion replicas of the equipment used by gladiators, athletes, and charioteers and attempt reenactments of ancient agonistic spectacles. While such reconstructions have long been practiced as entertainment by Hollywood and even in live contexts such as the chariot races staged for tourists at Jerash, Jordan,

more recently there has been a spate of more rigorously scholarly reenactment projects exploring both the equipment utilized by ancient performers and the tactics that arise from their particular characteristics. Within the last decade, elaborate projects in Germany and France have meticulously recreated entire gladiator schools complete with accurate copies of equipment for an array of different types of gladiators and have experimented with various combat styles and situations as described in sources and portrayed in ancient images (Junkelmann 2000; Teyssier and Lopez 2005). Such academic reenactments seem only to be increasing in popularity, with a gladiator project having been run at the University of Regensburg during the summer of 2010.

As entertaining and useful as such reenactments can be in understanding the practical details of ancient spectacles, they are not as informative in illuminating the attitudes or emotions of Roman performers and spectators. This is not to say that it is utterly impossible to tease out social implications from the examination of physical objects such as gladiatorial arms and armor. One study, for example, has cleverly been able to discern aspects of Roman cultural self-identity centered around traditional military virtues based solely on a close comparison of the equipment of gladiators and legionaries (Coulston 1998).

If we turn from performers to spectators and from pragmatics to attitudes, one rather specialized set of physical objects that eloquently testifies to the intense passions aroused by ancient performances is curse tablets. More than 80 *defixiones*, or lead curse tablets, have been found which invoke supernatural forces against actors, wrestlers, pantomime artists, and, most commonly, charioteers. In some cases the tablets are even directed against charioteers' horses and have been found hidden near the starting gates or in the stables of circus complexes. One such tablet, from Carthage, reads in part:

Bind the horses whose names and images I have entrusted to you [23 horses' names follow]. Bind their running, their power, their soul, their onrush, their speed. Take away their victory, entangle their feet, hinder them, hobble them, so that tomorrow morning in the hippodrome they are not able to run or walk, or win, or go out of the starting gates, or advance either on the racecourse, or circle around the turning point, but they may fall with their drivers. (*CIL* 8.12508, translation from Gager 1992: 60–2)

One could also attempt to use magic to ensure victory or ward off spells, as the following recipe indicates:

I adjure you angels of running, who run amid the stars, that you will gird with strength and courage the horses that N is racing

and his charioteer who is racing them. Let them run and not become weary nor stumble. Let them run and be swift as an eagle. Let no animals stand before them, and let no other magic or witchcraft affect them. (translation from Gager 1992: 59)

Defixiones such as these not only indicate the close identification that spectators felt with the fortunes of their favorite factions or performers, but reveal that some fans further believed that they could take an active role in affecting the outcome of competitions. Given the amount of gambling that seems to have accompanied chariot racing, a fan's investment in the victory of his favored team may have been more than just an emotional one. These tablets suggest the intense engagement (on several levels) that spectators sometimes felt with performers and help to explain the great popularity of such phenomena as Roman chariot racing.

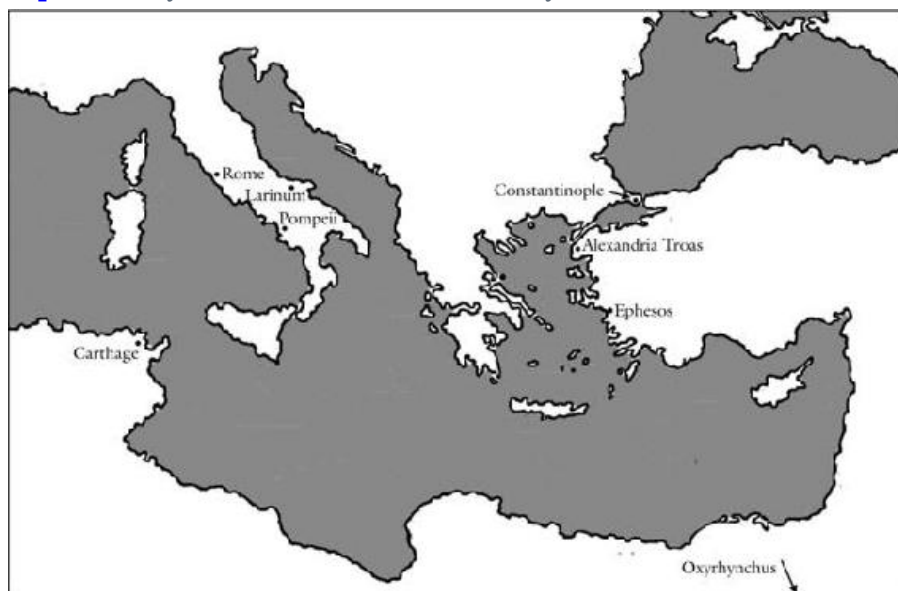
While literary sources tend to focus on exceptional spectacles that were unusual for their scale and expense, such as Trajan's astonishing 123 days' worth of games to celebrate his triumph over Dacia during the course of which supposedly 11,000 wild beasts were slain (Dio Cassius 68.15.1), a much more realistic and modest portrait of a typical day's worth of events is offered by a papyrus, found in Oxyrhynchus in Egypt (see [Map 29.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay) and dating to the sixth century CE, which preserves the following program of entertainments in the local circus: "First chariot race. Parade. Singing rope dancers. Second chariot race. The singing rope dancers. Third chariot race. Gazelle and hounds. Fourth chariot race. Mime show. Fifth chariot race. Troupe of athletes. Sixth chariot race" (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 2707).² Similarly, monuments erected by proud local magistrates at Pompeii describing the games that they provided reveal a relatively restrained program of entertainments; for example, one man's sponsorship of the *ludi Apollinares* included paying for a parade, some bulls and bullfighters, three pairs of gladiators, a group of boxers, and some musical pantomimes (*CIL* 10.1084d).

3 Nonliterary Texts

As has been noted by many scholars, the ancient Romans possessed the "epigraphic habit," meaning that they had a strong predilection for inscribing a wide range of nonliterary texts in stone and erecting monuments bearing these inscriptions. Why, how, and when this habit became established and why it flourished are fascinating questions revealing much about Roman society, but are well beyond the scope

of this essay. For now, we can only be grateful that the Romans went to the trouble of leaving such a quantity of information in such a durable format. These inscriptions represent a wide spectrum, from emperor to slave, in terms of the social class of the people who composed them, and include both official imperial proclamations and more personal messages, such as tombstone epitaphs. To these inscriptions can be added a number of other types of short texts, most notably messages scratched onto fragments of pottery, or onto walls as graffiti. These communications offer something extremely rare that more famous literary texts or art objects cannot – a glimpse of the hopes, dreams, opinions, and aspirations of common Romans. For the study of sport and spectacle, texts such as tombstone inscriptions are especially useful because many of them were composed or erected by people with personal ties to ancient performers, usually their families or their professional peers, thus bringing us tantalizingly close to the thoughts of groups who are otherwise silent or marginalized in upper-class sources.

Map 29.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



Some graffiti is clearly the work of Romans who were avid fans and thereby offer direct contact with the perspectives and feelings of ordinary people who watched these events. Of this type are probably the three crude sketches recording a series of gladiator fights, scratched on a tomb outside of Pompeii. The fan includes drawings of the different gladiators fighting and adds labels listing their names, previous records, and the outcome of the combats (*CIL* 4.10236–8; see Jacobelli 2003: 50–2, for images and discussion). Perhaps the reason

that this spectator was moved to memorialize these events in such detail was because this apparently was a remarkable show in which the veteran gladiator Hilarus, survivor of 14 combats and victor of 12, was shockingly defeated by Marcus Attilius, a novice fighter. In the same way that modern sports enthusiasts are sometimes obsessed with tracking the statistics of their favorite athletes, graffiti such as this one attest to a similar phenomenon among ancient fans, whose scribblings frequently list information such as the number of fights or races won. (For an even more extensive example of a graffiti consisting of a wearily long set of fight statistics, see *CIL* 4.2508.) In other instances, the graffiti, such as those found in structures identified as gladiator barracks, seem to have been authored by the gladiators themselves. Some of these grant us valuable clues as to their own self-image, as when one Pompeian gladiator identifies himself as “Celadus, the Thracian, who makes the girls sigh” (*CIL* 4.4397).

If we are trying to strip away the public façade and get a sense of the person behind the performer, however, perhaps no form of evidence speaks as eloquently as their grave markers. These were often erected by loved ones or peers, and, while obviously still presenting a constructed image and likely an idealized one at that, these monuments capture aspects of the performers’ humanity and their roles outside the arena. For example, one gravestone featuring a carving of a child holding the reins of a two-horse chariot reads, “I, Florus, rest here, a child driver of two-horse chariots, who wanted to race swiftly, but more swiftly fell into darkness. Iarnuarius made this for his most sweet foster-son.” (*ILS* 5300). Often it is a woman self-identified as a wife (whether legally recognized or not) who has been responsible for raising a monument to her lost lover: “To the departed spirit of Marcus Antonius Niger, veteran gladiator of the Thracian style, who lived 38 years and fought 18 times. Flavia Diogenis made this monument for her husband at her own expense because he deserved it well” (*ILS* 5090). Finally, grave monuments were commonly put up by one’s fellow performers, perhaps attesting to the strong bonds of friendship that often are forged by communal experience and by collectively facing danger: “Flamma, a *secutor*, lived 30 years, fought 34 times, was victorious 21 times, received *missio* standing 9 times, received *missio* 4 times, a Syrian by birth. Delicatus made this for a deserving comrade-in-arms” (*CIL* 10.7297; *ILS* 5113). (On *missio*, see Chapter 25.)

There are, in addition, several other types of inscriptions that, although produced by elites, have been central to our understanding of both the details of staging ancient spectacle and its societal status and role. *Senatus consulta*, or official decrees of the Roman Senate, were not infrequently inscribed on stone or bronze tablets, and several

of these have been especially important sources of information on ancient sport. One well-known example is a decree of 19 CE found at Larinum in Italy, which places stern restrictions on participation in any form of public performance by members of the Roman upper classes (Levick 1983). The decree is an explicit and vivid reiteration of the idea that performance on the stage or in the arena constitutes dishonor (*infamia*) and even the mildest association with such activities on the part of senators or equestrians is in serious “contravention of the dignity of their order.” Nevertheless, this document also brings out the underlying tension that, despite the social odium attached to these activities, they plainly possessed an irresistible allure. References in this *senatus consultum* to the passage of earlier laws prohibiting such participation indicate that these efforts were either unsuccessful or deemed to require reinforcement.

Another particularly informative *senatus consultum* dating to 177 CE represents an effort by the emperor Marcus Aurelius to regulate and limit the cost of presenting gladiatorial shows (*CIL* 2.6278; Carter 2003). That this decree was viewed as important legislation is perhaps attested by the fact that the two surviving copies of it were discovered at diametrically opposite ends of the Roman Empire, suggesting an attempt at universal enforcement. By this time, a hierarchy of gladiators had developed, ranging from the *novicius*, who was still in the initial training phase, up through the *tiro*, who was judged ready for his first fight, to the *veteranus*, who had fought at least once and survived, followed by four more ascending grades of experienced gladiators culminating in the top rank of *primus palus*. Marcus Aurelius’s *senatus consultum* of 177 builds off this structure to establish an elaborate system of maximum costs, setting down how much could be spent on various classes of gladiators as a function of the overall expenditure on a particular set of gladiatorial games. This text speaks to the elaborateness of the organizational structure of the ancient spectacle industry, as well as illustrating concerns about the costs of regularly staging these shows.

Exciting, newly discovered inscriptions continue to illuminate hitherto unknown aspects of ancient performances. For example, fragments of several letters from the emperor Hadrian to the Wandering Guild of Dionysiac Artists were found in 2003 in Alexandria Troas in what is now Turkey (Petzl and Schwertheim 2006; English translation available in Potter and Mattingly 2010: 352–71). A lot of these texts consist of the emperor reaffirming specific rights of the actors (many of which also seem to apply to athletes) in regard to various contractual issues, usually involving money. Among many other provisos, it is spelled out that prizes must be paid in cash, not in goods such as wine or grain, that prizes must still be distributed

if a contest is canceled or interrupted, and that the prize money must be displayed at the contest. An interesting passage addressing a nonmonetary concern states that while it may be necessary to strike contestants with whips in some contexts, such floggings should not be excessively brutal. Another letter lays out a grand reorganization of the entire quadrennial calendar of major agonistic competitions. It establishes a schedule for the staging of the traditional Greek Panhellenic festivals as well as various prominent games in cities in Italy and elsewhere. These remarkable documents offer insights into the sorts of concerns that performers had, as well as the degree to which the emperor could become involved in the micromanagement of local disputes.

A set of commemorative inscriptions for ancient performers that perhaps deserve special mention consists of several that were erected in honor of especially successful charioteers. The most notable of these is an inscription found at Rome describing the career of a second-century CE champion charioteer named Gaius Appuleius Diocles (*CIL* 6.10048 = *ILS* 5287; see, similarly, the sixth-century CE monument in Constantinople to Porphyrius Calliopas, extensively analyzed in Cameron 1973). In the course of enumerating Diocles' considerable achievements during his long and extraordinarily successful career, the inscription offers a wealth of information about many different aspects of chariot racing. Like modern champion athletes, star charioteers could apparently switch teams, as Diocles at various points raced for the Reds, Whites, and Greens. (On chariot racing, see Chapter 33.) His total career winnings topped 35 million sesterces, a vast sum and one that indicates the wealth to which successful athletes could aspire. Among the myriad statistics recorded are that he won 1,462 victories over the course of a 24-year career and competed in races driving chariots with two, three, four, six, and even seven horses. Successful chariot-racing strategies are suggested by other statistics, such as the fact that 815 of his victories came from seizing the lead at the outset of a race and holding it, 502 from winning a sprint at the end of the race, and only 67 from coming from behind to overtake the leader.

4 Cultural Objects

Why would someone want an image of one human murdering another engraved on the flask he or she drank from, or stamped onto the lamp that illuminated his or her home? Why would a representation of a despised slave be considered an appropriate form in which to cast a

candlestick holder? Another category of material evidence consists of everyday objects that are decorated with images of sport and spectacle. Like the other material types discussed, these can be particularly useful for what they reveal about the attitudes of the ordinary Romans who were the main consumers of ancient spectacular performances. Images of scenes from the circus or amphitheater are a common feature of humble and often mass-produced household objects. While the range of such objects is considerable, encompassing basic items such as cups, flasks, plates, jewelry, mirrors, and even toys, I will consider just one representative example in this essay: the near-ubiquitous oval, clay lamp.

Some of these lamps are actually molded so as to imitate the form of various pieces of equipment used by performers, such as a number of extant lamps in the shape of helmets. Others bear depictions of weapons or, more commonly, of solitary gladiators or charioteers (or even, in one case, a prize horse) standing triumphantly after a victory. However, the decorations on a great number of these lamps focus on scenes of action and explicit violence. Thus, on different lamps, we see a wrecked charioteer being gruesomely trampled beneath the sharp hooves of a rival's horses, or a savage lion snarling as it leaps onto a terrified horse's back, or a disarmed gladiator standing helplessly as he waits for his victorious opponent to plunge a sword into his exposed body (see [Figure 29.2](#)). (All of the lamps mentioned in this paragraph are illustrated and briefly discussed in Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000: 37–8, 47, 51, 73, 86, 88, 101, 128, 131, 135).

Much is often made of the apparent similarities between Roman and modern sport and spectacle, but objects such as these lamps embody crucial differences. That such graphic and voyeuristic images of violence would be considered appropriate and unremarkable choices for decorating common household goods is a useful reminder that there are aspects of the value system of the Romans that, from a modern perspective, do indeed represent a sense of true “otherness.” For example, in the city where I live, I could easily purchase and display in my living room, to universal approval, a lamp molded in the shape of a football gaudily emblazoned with the colors of the local team. However, were I to replace it with one cast in the form of one man knifing another (or even, say, a tiger disemboweling a rhinoceros) this would certainly draw many disapproving comments. Not only do such objects illuminate key aspects of Roman social values but they also highlight some of the tensions latent in the system as well. Many scholars have fruitfully explored the status dissonance created by the fact that while gladiators could enjoy great fame and popularity and even embodied some core Roman ideals of masculinity and military prowess, they were simultaneously despised for their

servile status and for employing their bodies in the amusement of others. (On such issues, see, for example, Barton 1993; Wiedemann 1992; Futrell 1997; and Potter 2010.)

Figure 29.2 Roman clay lamp from London (made in Gaul or Britain) showing gladiatorial combat, first century CE. *Source:* British Museum P&EE 1856.7–1.336, © Trustees of the British Museum.



Another type of cultural object that encapsulates many values in relation to ancient spectacles is the coins and commemorative disks minted by the Roman state. Roman numismatics is a complex field, and any interpretation of the images or slogans on a coin raises problematic issues of intent and audience. But one area in which coins can be especially instructive is in determining the appearance and decorative schemes of the structures used to stage public entertainments. Coins showing the arrangement of statues on the façade of the Colosseum or the profusion of monuments in the Circus Maximus in Rome are one of the best sources of information for

reconstructing how these famous buildings looked to the performers and spectators who used them. Also, the mottos selected to be stamped onto coins commemorating specific festivals can tell us how the sponsors of these events desired them to be perceived. Thus, a coin celebrating the truly spectacular Secular Games put on in 204 CE by Septimius Severus bears, on one side, the emperor's profile and, on the other, an image of the enormous ship he placed in the circus, which, upon a signal, disgorged hordes of exotic animals. On the coin, surrounding the representation of this truly spectacular event, is the label "*Laetitia Temporum*" ("Happy Times"). (On Roman coins depicting structures used for sport and spectacle, see Hill 1989 and Tameanko 1999. For an alternative interpretation of this coin, see Bingham and Simonsen 2008.)

Analysis of the images on coins can also sometimes hint at more subtle aspects of attitudes toward ancient performance. For example, many coins depicting events in the amphitheater or circus show these scenes from an artificial bird's-eye perspective that no actual spectator could have enjoyed. Furthermore, the scenes often conflate several different chronological moments in an attempt to create a kind of continuous and all-encompassing narrative. Such images encourage a psychological perspective in which the action of the performance and the experience of the spectator are linked to grander cycles or structures of time and community (see Bergmann 2008).

5 Burials and Bones

One of the more exciting recent discoveries that has revealed completely new types of information about Roman gladiators was the 1993 identification and subsequent excavation of a cemetery exclusively containing the bodies of gladiators at the city of Ephesus in modern Turkey. Because of the low social status of gladiators, they were a stigmatized group, and so it is not surprising to find that they were buried apart from others in a specially designated area. Archaeologists have been able to identify 67 bodies from this graveyard who seem to have been gladiators, all but one of whom were young males between the ages of 20 and 30. (All specific facts in this section are taken from Kanz and Grossschmidt 2002 and 2006.)

By examining marks on their bones, it is possible to identify both old trauma injuries that had healed as well as ones that had not and which thus were presumably inflicted at or near the time of death. These marks offer direct evidence of the sorts of injuries that gladiators suffered, indicate the types of weapons that inflicted them,

and even suggest how these weapons were employed. A surprising number of injuries were to the skull, emphasizing the face-to-face nature of gladiatorial combat. For example, 16% of the individuals displayed well-healed head injuries, with nearly half of these exhibiting multiple healed wounds. The location and nature of many of these injuries indicate that they were the result of repeated blows to the wearer's helmet, while others seem to have been inflicted directly by strikes from a bladed weapon such as a sword. 15% of the men in the graveyard had unhealed skull injuries, indicating that these were either the cause of death or else happened very close to the time of death. Some of these are massive blunt force trauma injuries such as might have been caused by being struck with a shield. One of the most interesting consists of a pair of perforations of the skull whose diameters and spacing strongly suggest that the injuries were inflicted by a trident, the characteristic weapon of the *retiarius* type of gladiator. A number of fatal blows to the skull also seem to have been made by a square hammer, a weapon known to be used in the arena to dispatch fatally wounded gladiators. Notches on bones in the spine and shoulder blades indicate other types of killing blows administered with a sword. The knee of one man bore a very unusual injury consisting of four dents in a square pattern, a wound which can be matched up to a specialized gladiator weapon with four prongs. By examining these bones we gain vivid knowledge of the causes of death and injury to gladiators and thus we can better understand the course of these ancient combats.

Gladiators' bones can reveal much more information than just how these men died; they can also tell us vital facts about how they lived. For example, isotopic analysis of their bones has revealed that they ate a mostly vegetarian diet that was rich in carbohydrates. One slang term for gladiators was *hordearii*, or "barley boys," and this scientific analysis confirms that gladiators indeed probably ingested large quantities of grains. On such a diet, gladiators may have carried substantial layers of fat that actually would have helped them survive superficial cuts and slashes by blanketing vital organs and vessels under a thick fatty stratum.

By applying such modern scientific procedures to this ancient evidence, it is possible to glean new types of information that flesh out the old images of gladiators that we have long held, primarily derived from the traditional literary sources. Other possible gladiator burials have come to light, and as fresh archaeological discoveries and even newer technologies become available, there is hope that we may be able to gain yet further knowledge from such material evidence as these old bones.

ABBREVIATIONS

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

ILS = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*

NOTES

1 Sports activities and athletic competitions, including the great quadrennial athletic festivals such as the Olympic Games, continued into the Roman era (see Chapter 36), but here I will concentrate for the most part on the more distinctively Roman forms of sport and spectacle, with particular attention to gladiatorial combat, which today is undoubtedly the most famous, and on chariot racing, which was probably the most popular and frequently attended by ordinary Romans.

2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of ancient texts were produced by G. Aldrete.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Two general sourcebooks of translated documents specifically on Roman sport and spectacle, including a representative selection of epitaphs, decrees, and graffiti, are Futrell 2006 and Mahoney 2001; see also the relevant sections of Shelton 1998.

For those interested in gladiator equipment, Junkelmann 2000 contains a useful catalog with color photographs (161–87) of surviving examples of gladiator armor, mostly helmets. Comprehensive published accounts of some of the recent attempts at reenactment are Teyssier and Lopez 2005 and Junkelmann 2000.

There are several collections of inscriptions (in the original languages) specifically related to gladiators: for the Greek East, the old but still indispensable reference is Robert 1940, and for the West, see now the four volumes of the *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'occidente Roman* (1988–96) by various editors. Other standard collections of inscriptions relevant to sport and spectacle are the *CIL* and the *ILS*. Within these multivolume sets, a concentration of inscriptions relating to the Roman circus and charioteers can be found in *CIL* 6.10047–79 and *ILS* 5277–316, while *CIL* 6.10083–161 and *ILS* 5181–210 deal with actors.

Enlightening discussions of how social values can be derived from the tombstones of gladiators include Hope 1998 and 2000 and Garraffoni 2008.

The classic works on chariot racing and circuses are Cameron 1976 and Humphrey 1986, while Meijer 2010 offers a reader-friendly, up-to-date summary of the subject. See also the specialized essays in Nelis-Clément and Roddaz 2008. Some examinations of the lively topic of circus curse tablets are Heintz 1998 and Gager 1990 and 1992.

A selection of color images of toys, lamps, and other material objects relating to Roman sport and spectacle are conveniently available in Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000 and Jacobelli 2003, which also contains reproductions of many of the most famous gladiator graffiti.

On entertainment structures on coins, see Bergmann 2008; Elkins 2006; Tameanko 1999; and Desnier 1990.

The evidence from the gladiator cemetery at Ephesos is described by Kanz and Grossschmidt 2002, 2006, 2009, and in Curry 2008.

CHAPTER 30

Trends in the Study of Roman Spectacle and Sport

Jerry Toner

1 Introduction

Why did the Romans enjoy watching staged, bloody combats that frequently ended in death? What kind of society spends vast resources on entertaining itself with lavish spectacles? How can we in the modern world even begin to understand what was at stake in the circus and the arena? Questions such as these have made, and continue to make, the study of the Roman games a fascinating subject that provides an inexhaustible supply of intellectual interest. The aim of this piece is to give an overview of some of the directions in which research on Roman sport and spectacle has headed over recent years. I make no claim to be exhaustive because so much material has been published on the subject, but the sheer variety of approaches speaks volumes about what an immensely rich field this has been and remains.

Interest in what the games meant to the Romans is a relatively recent development. In the past most historians were unable to look beyond the gore. Blinded by the moral blinkers of the Western Christian tradition, they could not grasp how such a great civilizer as Rome could also have developed such a taste for violent public combats. One writer described these “bloodthirsty human holocausts” as “by far the nastiest blood-sport ever invented.” In fact, he claimed that “the two most quantitatively destructive institutions in History are Nazism and the Roman Gladiators” (Grant 1967: 124, 8).

Undeniably horrific as the games appear to a modern outlook, it is equally true that in the Roman world the games represented

something both civilized and peculiarly Roman. Seneca argued that the Romans saw the turning of a man into a corpse as a “satisfying spectacle” (*satisque spectacula*, *Letters from a Stoic* 95.33).¹ Representations of gladiators were incorporated into a variety of domestic situations: as decorations on lamps and as wind chimes to ward off evil spirits for example. Gladiators were also the subjects of splendid mosaics and wall paintings in the home (see Chapters 28 and 29 in this volume). The amphitheater came to represent, as it still does, the quintessential Roman building.

The aim of most recent scholarship, therefore, has been to move away from sensationalist detailing of the horrors and equipment of these violent mass spectacles toward interpretive approaches that try to understand the importance of the games within a wider social context and to explain the various different attributes that enabled them to play such a role.

2 Sport and Spectacle as Entertainment

It is impossible to comprehend Roman sport and spectacle without bearing in mind that Romans placed a high value on leisure. It is worth remembering that in Latin the word for leisure, *otium*, came first in the conceptual order ahead of its opposite, work, which was termed “not-leisure,” *negotium* (Toner 1995: 17–33).

Sport and spectacle became a favored way for the people of Rome to make use of their leisure time. Fronto, writing in the early second century CE, claimed that the Roman people were concerned especially with two things, the grain supply and spectacles, and that they cared more about the latter than the former (*Preface to History* 17).

The games staged in Rome held appeal on many levels, starting from the simple and essential fact that they provided engaging, almost overwhelming entertainment. Indeed, it was perhaps the total sensory overload that most marked out the experience of these spectacular entertainments. All the senses were deployed as part of the spectacle (Toner 2009: 151–9). Light and color, for example, were used to dramatic effect. If we are to believe our somewhat exaggerated sources, the emperor Domitian once had a circle of lights lowered into the Colosseum at dusk, turning night into day (Statius *Silvae* 1.6.85–90; cf. Suetonius *Domitian* 4). Caligula held nighttime performances and lit up the whole city, which naturally only served to underline his immorality to moralists (Suetonius *Caligula* 18; Tacitus *Annals* 14.20–

1). Awnings were provided to help control the distribution of light within the amphitheater (see, for example, Pliny *Natural History* 19.23–5). This benefited the audience by protecting them from the scorching heat of the daytime sun, but more symbolically, it created the shade that was associated with the life of leisure. The awnings also served to spotlight the performance areas so that all the action took place in the bright heat of the arena. The best fights were regarded as those where the combatants did not run away into the corners but where the “slaughter happens in the center where the amphitheater can see it” (Petronius *Satyricon* 45). The sand (*harena*) on the arena floor helped reinforce this spotlighting effect by means of its glittering reflectiveness.

The games brought an explosion of color in the Roman world. The color, size, and sound of exotic animals imported into the arena overturned the normal sensory rules of sight, movement, and sound. Animals might be enhanced by decoration, such as having gilded manes or dyed coats (Seneca *Letters from a Stoic* 41.6). Colorful costumes added to the attractions of some executions, with condemned criminals entering dressed in gold tunics, purple cloaks, and gold crowns, which then spontaneously combusted (Plutarch *Moralia* 554b; *Passio Perpetua* 18).² The people liked such broad brush strokes of bright colors, and the spectacles met the demands of this sense of taste.

It is also important to consider the overall sensory impact of the environment in which the games took place. The Colosseum, for example, was decorated with statues, stucco decoration, and brightly colored plaster.³ The crowd was seated according to status, which created a hierarchy of clothing and color, from the pure white togas of the citizens to the darker tunics of the poor in the seating at the back (Livy 34.54; Pliny *Natural History* 16.6; Suetonius *Augustus* 44; Martial *Epigrams* 4.2, 5.14, 5.41). The religious ceremony that preceded the games was led by the presiding magistrate in the garb of a general celebrating a triumph (a gold-braided purple toga and a tunic embroidered with palm fronds). In his hand he held an ivory scepter with an eagle’s head, and on his head he wore a bejeweled wreath of golden oak leaves (Juvenal *Satires* 10.36–46). Musicians, statues of gods, and pictures of the emperor and his family were part of the procession. As they entered the arena the crowd rose and cheered in ritual acclamation, chanting the emperor’s name. The trumpets sounded to start the contests. Flutes signaled the first gladiatorial fight. Sensory triggers such as these guided the social progression of the performance, making sure that the crowd knew when to do what, what was about to happen, and how to feel (Toner 2009: 150–3).

3 Sport and Spectacle as a Political and Moral Arena

During the Republic, wealthy and ambitious members of the Roman elite found it expedient to spend lavishly on games in order to curry favor with the populace. Roman society expected the wealthy and powerful to provide public benefits out of their pocket and this expectation was not disappointed, a reciprocal arrangement termed *euergetism* by Paul Veyne (1990). The games were what Keith Hopkins called a “tax on status” (1983: 13); the wealthy spent prodigiously to provide public entertainments including games because this brought great popularity and prestige. The thunderous applause the giver of a show received meant an enormous amount to him. Cicero rejoiced when he received “wonderful cheers without any hostile catcalls” (Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 1.16.11; see also 2.19.3).

Even after the end of the Republic, elites, particularly those living in cities other than Rome, continued to pay for games. The Magerius mosaic, which was created in the third century CE and portrays a staged animal hunt (*venatio*) funded by a local magistrate in Roman North Africa, shows that being able to give the crowd what it wanted and being acclaimed for doing so was the pinnacle of provincial public life. The mosaic includes a considerable amount of text (see Figure 42.1), with Magerius boasting, “This is what it means to be rich, this is what it means to be powerful” (Futrell 1997: 121–2; Bomgardner 2009).⁴ Self-aggrandizing mosaics such as these acted as permanent reminders of private munificence and reflected the glory that local elites felt accrued to them from giving games. The games offered clear opportunities for self-advancement, as well as providing local elites with an outlet for competitive display.

Games were also a way for local elites to declare publicly their loyalty to the culture of the dominant Roman regime, and the holding of games throughout the Roman Empire helped bind the Empire together through the shared pursuit of pleasure. Spectacles created a cultural vocabulary that helped unite the diverse peoples under Roman control. In such a multicultural empire, the games met a need for social unity, cohesion, and integration. In other words, they were key to bringing about Romanization.⁵

In Rome itself, individual members of the elite provided spectacles long after the end of the Republic, but the emperors came to play a dominant role in this part of the life of the Empire’s capital. It was imperative for emperors to spend liberally on the games as it was by this means that they could win the people over (Fronto *Preface to*

History 17). This political aspect to the spectacles has been widely studied, but recent scholarship has emphasized the fact that the games were not simply the gifts from an all-powerful emperor; they fulfilled important political and social functions in the life of imperial Rome.

The Late Republic (c.100–31 BCE) and Early Imperial (31 BCE–68 CE) period saw the end of the traditional system of popular assemblies, a development which denied the Roman people a formal voice in high politics. The games allowed communication between the emperor and his people and became symbolic of the reciprocal relationship that had been established between them (Veyne 1990: 347–482). It is, therefore, important to emphasize that spectacles were about much more than entertainment. They met an urgent need to establish a new political settlement between the Romans and their leaders after the troubles of the Late Republic. In some ways, this dialogue can be thought of as teaching the emperor how to do his job. It was when acting out his role as supreme patron to his people that he truly felt what it was to be emperor: giving generous gifts, hearing his people's complaints, showing interest or even getting actively involved in the shows, bullying aristocrats, granting clemency to the fallen. All these acts brought home the reality of imperial power.

Moreover, the games created a focal point in which Roman society was able to articulate its own self-image and core values. The games represented a socially sanctioned, respectable display of societal norms.⁶

Death provided valuable lessons to the viewer (Kyle 1998). Most of the people who died in the arena were not gladiators but those condemned to death. Kyle has shown how the human body, whether strong, broken, branded, or costumed, was profoundly meaningful in Roman society. The treatment of the bodies of the condemned therefore provided a means of symbolically reasserting the values of the society whose laws they had broken. It was the execution of the deviant for the enjoyment of the decent. Preindustrial societies generally had to rely on such public punishments to enforce their norms because they did not have forces of law and order such as the police. The execution-as-entertainment, therefore, represented much more than the expression of any individual sadistic psychopathology. Rome was a society that had a "commitment to cruelty," and brutality was built into the system, whether it was in the form of military conquest, the harsh treatment of slaves, or the subordination of women (Barton 1993: 47–81). In such a male-dominant, militaristic, hierarchical society, violence was the perfectly appropriate medium to hammer home these norms.

It is, however, easy to put too much emphasis on gladiators dying in the arena. In almost all the records of combat uncovered in

Pompeii, for example, the defeated gladiator was granted mercy.⁷ Many gladiators were spared on multiple occasions, particularly once they had become favorites with the crowd. Instead, what seems to have been the focus for the Roman spectator was the style, strength, and skill of the combatant, rather in the way that aficionados of bullfighting concentrate on the courage and grace of the matador rather than the kill itself. Quintilian describes how gladiators and wrestlers who rely solely on their strength are usually undone by their opponents' skill: "Often the wrestler is overthrown by his own force, and the gladiator who charges in is parried with a gentle turn of the wrist" (*Institutes of Oratory* 2.12.2). Similarly, in the circus the charioteer was expected to be an expert strategist.⁸

The games highlighted the technical virtuosity and physical endurance of individual performers and, in doing so, raised the attributes of the traditional Roman soldier to the status of an art form. The muscular sports star became a metaphor for Roman society: tough, disciplined, and skillful. The proper conventions also had to be observed in death. The gladiator was expected to die in the correct position: chest out, leaning to the right, head drooping, half-seated on his weapons. A gladiator learned in his training school how to "accept the sword" and receive the blow "with his whole body" (Cicero *For Sextus Roscius* 33). This was the dying swan of the Roman world, a formalized, stylized way of death.⁹

The performers in the shows also acquired a political role because of their importance as mediators in the relationship between an emperor and his people. They became powerful in their own right, deriving their strength both from imperial patronage and also from their popularity with the nonelite. Many emperors liked to associate with the stars in public.¹⁰

The performers also reflected the kind of assertive masculinity that men needed to exhibit if they were to do well in life. Competitors had to take carefully calculated physical risks and perform repetitious tasks with accuracy, skill, and bravura. Charioteers epitomized the attributes that people needed in their daily lives: technical expertise, resilience, strength, intelligence, and the ability to jockey for position. The games therefore allowed the Romans to personify popular virtues in heroic terms. This heroism helped turn the gladiators into sex symbols, although it is worth noting Beard's comments regarding two famous graffiti from Pompeii. One, stating "Celadus, heartthrob of the girls," and the other "Cresces . . . puts right the night-time girls, the morning girls, and all the others," were in fact found inside the gladiatorial barracks. These were not the fantasies of the girls but of the gladiators themselves (Beard 2008: 275).

Despite the undeniably important political and moral role sport

and spectacle played in Roman society, we should remember that neither sport and spectacle, nor the political and moral messages encoded in sport and spectacle, met with universal approbation.¹¹ Christians, for example, symbolically rejected Roman values in the place where they were most conspicuously on display. Many mainstream Roman writers also had problems with the games, primarily based around their perceived immorality. Ironically, these moral concerns emanated from the very people who were often funding them. But these elite anxieties reveal that the games were not entirely unproblematic in Roman society. These condemnations of the games partly reflect the fact that many elite Romans did not believe that the poor either deserved such generous leisure provision or knew how to handle its potentially corrupting effects.

There were also political concerns. The emperors needed to win over the people, but, by supporting popular causes such as mass entertainment, they risked alienating the elite who saw themselves as worthier of imperial patronage. The emperor needed to carry out a careful balancing act, dividing his favors to each group according to their status. Emperors who were seen to be overly generous toward the crowd, such as Nero, could expect to face an elite backlash that found expression, in part, in literary sources. On the other hand, emperors who did not put on games, such as Tiberius, became unpopular as a direct result.

Emperors were themselves on display when they gave their games, and the degree to which they met public expectations affected depictions of their character by later historians (see, for example, Bradley 1981). Anecdotal stories about how individual emperors behaved in the games became an acceptable part of serious history because they could be used as political weapons by Roman historians against emperors whose regimes they disliked.

The fact that Rome's political leaders deliberately aimed their games at a mass audience shows that the people did have an active influence on the form of the spectacles. The arena became, in effect, the people's palace. The games can therefore reveal a lot about what the people liked because the sponsors gave them what they wanted in return for popularity. Above all, the games tell us that the people demanded their entertainment be spectacular. This was no place for modest restraint. Everything was done to excess, which reflected a culture very different from that of the elite. And at the heart of the people's demands was that they wanted their own slice of the life of leisure that was, under normal circumstances, the preserve of the wealthy.

Even if the games appeared gaudy to some moralists, the people expressed their amazement at the spectacles within an environment

that was very much in the control of the emperor. The rich sensual experience that came with sport and spectacle had a powerful impact on spectators. The moral and the sensual were fused into a political alloy that overcame traditional objections to the nonelite having access to leisure and luxury. Life in Rome was always a strongly sensuous experience, but in the games a new burden was placed on the senses to win over the crowd and recreate the social harmony that had been lost in the discord of the Late Republic. This strategy made use of what were seen as the morally affective properties of the senses. That is to say, it was believed that an individual's character would reflect his or her physical environment. Public space was therefore employed to provide luxury for the Roman people in a way that would leave them morally improved. The games would not corrupt the people because they manipulated sensory values to maintain social hierarchy and create social consensus.

4 The Crowd as Participant

The spectators were in no way the ignorant and bloodthirsty rabble they used to be accused of being. A century ago, the German historian, Friedländer, described the crowd as “a proletariat, more corrupt and wilder and rougher than in modern capitals, composed of the dregs of every nation,” and as a “mob” which consisted “mostly of idlers” (1928–36: vol. 2: 2). But now it is recognized that, after Augustus's legislation of the late first century BCE, the audience at spectacles in fact became a microcosm of respectable society, carefully graded by social status. In the Colosseum, perhaps as many as 60 percent of the seats were filled by the well-off, with only 40 percent being reserved for the urban poor and women (Hopkins and Beard 2005: 106–12). But the important point was that they were all symbolically included, albeit in a way that also spelled out to them their place in the social hierarchy.

Furthermore, the crowd was also a knowledgeable and sophisticated group fully capable of expressing their own opinions to those in authority. We have noted already how important acclamations were to the wealthy. They gave the elite a sense of legitimacy about their rule. The fact that this was what the emperors wanted meant that this was what they (usually) got. The people nearly always gave them the standing ovations they so craved. But occasionally, the people would hold back their applause in what was a powerfully critical comment on their rulers. Other collective actions such as chanting and clapping in unison, shouting out complaints,

hurling abuse, and whispering gossip could all have a powerful impact on the games, even if in reality these episodes were relatively few and far between.¹²

The fact that people did not always do what was expected of them raises the question of whether they were always completely sincere in their acclamations. Reading about the ritual applause and cheering for emperors, it is hard not to recall the kind of reception that habitually greeted Saddam Hussein when he was still in power. People were just too afraid to do anything other than cheer. We must, of course, be careful not to imbue the Romans with an anachronistic, modern political cynicism. There were plenty of reasons why, for the most part, Roman citizens appreciated the benefits that imperial rule brought them, not least of which was the lavish entertainment of the games.

Yet we must also remember that the autocratic regime of the Empire encouraged flattery and sycophancy at the cost of free speech. Pliny describes that when people heard that the emperor was coming they would gather and cheer him in the hope of getting some gifts in return. They even taught their children the formula to chant (Pliny the Younger *Panegyric* 26). It sounds as if the people were cleverly massaging the imperial ego in order to get something for free. Likewise, in the games, the chants were sometimes so orchestrated that they were part of the processional entrance (Ovid *Amores* 3.2.43). How genuine and spontaneous were the feelings that were being expressed on these occasions? It is impossible to say. But the fact that the ruling elite had made such a mess of Roman politics in the Late Republic, causing the deaths of tens of thousands of normal Romans, should make us alert to the possibility that the people did not automatically accept their rulers' legitimacy or claims to good governance.

The possibility that the audience was actively able to interpret events in the games in ways that were at odds with the intended message is supported by evidence that they were as a group sophisticated and critical consumers. Some became such fanatics that they generated their own communities of experts. Their endless talk about the races and fights turned the shows into a cultural resource with which they could help create their own identities. Others just went to games to look at women instead of learning how to be proper Romans as the emperors might have intended (Ovid *Art of Love* 1.135–70). The crowd seems to have sometimes ignored the seating and dress codes (for example, Suetonius *Domitian* 8; Martial *Epigrams* 5.23). They scratched graffiti into stone, turning the architecture into a blank surface for their own messages. The seats in the amphitheater in Aphrodisias, in Turkey, for example, were littered with gambling

boards, sketches of phalluses, and abuse. “Bad years for the Greens,” reads one (Roueché 1993: 102). There was more than one way to watch the games as a spectator. Sometimes there also seems to be unofficial humor implanted in the performance. The Magerius mosaic shows a leopard called “Romanus” being speared by a hunter; was this a little North African joke at the expense of their foreign masters?

The crowd certainly expressed its own views strongly on some occasions. Food crises were situations where the crowd seems to have shouted out their complaints during the shows. During problems with the grain supply in Rome, Tacitus tells us that protests broke out in the theater that were “more vocal than usual,” implying that this was the normal response of the crowd to food shortages. He also tells us that these complaints of the people “were not kept quiet,” which is what obviously happened usually because people were too scared of making their voice heard (*Annals* 6.13, 12.43). But even such sotto voce grumblings can be seen as an active attempt by the crowd to generate a groundswell of public opinion that could compel the emperor to meet their needs. They turned the emperor’s own image of Super-Patron against himself, in effect saying that if he was the great and generous ruler he claimed to be, then he should also be able to sort out these problems. It is what the historian E. P. Thompson called a “moral economy,” in which the people felt that their rulers had a moral obligation to make sure they could buy food at a fair price. Meeting this obligation was the price the powerful paid for being in control (Thompson 1971).

We should not, however, overestimate the degree of resistance that these public protests and riots represented. Protest was a way for the people to try to persuade their patron to intervene on their behalf and thereby restore normal political relations. As Alan Cameron has noted, such demonstrations could be seen positively from above as they gave the emperor an opportunity to show off his good qualities by delivering a solution to the problem, whatever it might be. It was a chance to demonstrate that he had the “popular touch” (Cameron 1976: 175). Of course, rioting was not a tactic that the people could employ too often for fear of violent suppression. But when they did use it, it generally seems to have worked, with over three-quarters of violent protests bringing about official action to address the problem that stirred the crowd into action (Vanderbroeck 1987: 152). Not all riots were about such important matters as the food supply or politics. Some riots seem to have been little more than exuberant acts of collective hooliganism (Cameron 1976: 170). One legal statute refers to “those commonly known as young men,” who misbehave at the spectacles and “in certain cities associate themselves with disruptive acclamations by the populace” (*Digest* 48.19.28.3). A fight in the

amphitheater at Pompeii in 59 CE, between spectators from the towns of Nuceria and Pompeii, that resulted in many deaths arose out of a “trifling incident” at a gladiatorial show: “They swapped abuse – so typical of these red-neck towns – which led to stone throwing, and then swords were drawn” (Tacitus *Annals* 14.17; see also Jacobelli 2003: 106).

Given these events, it is perhaps not surprising that the elite thought the crowd volatile and fickle. But we should bear in mind that the crowd’s volatility was also an index of its own autonomy. The crowd was not simply something to be manipulated by its leaders – individuals made up their own minds. And in any case, perhaps if they were fickle they were simply copying the inconsistent and arbitrary decision-making processes of the emperors themselves.

5 Conclusion

Much recent scholarship on the spectacles has tried to reactivate the crowd, emphasizing that it was not a mere political pawn. The emperors needed the people’s support to legitimize their rule, which made vast expenditure on providing spectacular entertainments a sound political investment. The rituals of the spectacles also expressed the aspirations of the emperor’s government in a dramatic form. They wanted to be leaders of a well-ordered, disciplined society that knew how to use its leisure properly. These social ideals were publicly reaffirmed by the vicious punishments meted out to the condemned. The games were also a means for the emperors to express their wealth, power, and political dominance of Roman society. In such an environment it is not surprising that the people mostly delivered the acclamations and applause that the emperors wanted, particularly in the amphitheater where the audience was more weighted toward those with a larger stake in Roman society. It was only extremist Christian martyrs who were prepared to challenge this society openly, and they paid a high price for doing so. We should not doubt that to a large extent the games did their job and made people grateful for living in a peaceful and prosperous society under a beneficent emperor. But we should also be alert to the fact that the people could withhold their consent and did not always consume the games in the way that was intended. These occasional complaints in the “safe area” of the games mostly succeeded in compelling their leaders to intervene to their benefit. Resistance was useful.

NOTES

- 1 Except where otherwise indicated, all English translations of ancient texts in this essay are my own.
- 2 On public executions, see Chapter 35 in this volume.
- 3 On the appearance of the Colosseum, see the useful illustrations and reconstructions in Connolly and Dodge 1998:190–217.
- 4 On mosaics depicting sport and spectacle, including the Magerius mosaic, see Chapter 28; on beast hunts, see Chapter 34.
- 5 On spectacle as a means of Romanization, see Chapter 42, as well as Mann 2009.
- 6 On spectacle as a display of societal norms, see Auguet 1972 (1970), Hopkins 1983: 1–30, Edmondson 1996, and Gunderson 1996.
- 7 On gladiatorial combats, see Chapter 25.
- 8 On chariot racing, see Chapter 33.
- 9 On spectacle performers as embodiments of Roman social ideals, see Wiedemann 1992: 1–54.
- 10 On the political importance of performers and their connections to emperors, see Beacham 1999.
- 11 On Roman criticisms of sport and spectacle, see Chapter 41.
- 12 On the crowd as an active agent at spectacles, see Cameron 1976: 157–92; Hopkins 1983: 14–20; Köhne 2000; Veyne 1990: 292–482; Wiedemann 1992: 165–83; and Yavetz 1969.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Two general sourcebooks of translated primary material relating to Roman spectacle are Futrell 2006 and Mahoney 2001. For a readable and balanced overview of the spectacles as a whole, see Potter 2010. On gladiators, the range of books is vast, but Wiedemann 1992 and Hopkins and Beard 2005 offer clear and accessible introductions, as do Cameron 1976 and Humphrey 1986 for the circus. Friedländer 1928–36 is still an excellent overview of the literary evidence and a good read but has, along with Grant 1967, in many places been superseded. Those interested in the psychology of the gladiatorial combats should see Barton 1993; Fagan 2011; and Hopkins 1983. On the notion of leisure and *otium*, see Toner 1995. On the relationship between popular culture and the games, see Toner 2009, who also discusses the sensory impact of the spectacles and the social and political use to which this was put. On the games as a place of dialogue between the emperor and his people, see Cameron 1976; Hopkins 1983; Köhne 2000; Yavetz 1969; Veyne 1990; and Wiedemann 1992.

Veyne contains the widest discussion of the concept of euergetism, examining the reason why the Roman elite willingly spent such vast sums on providing lavish entertainment. For attempts to recreate the wider contexts within which to interpret the meanings of Roman games, see Hopkins 1983; Wiedemann 1992; and Toner 1995, 2009. These works also look at the ways in which Roman historians use

emperors' behavior as a way to understand their moral character. Kyle 1998 shows how the confirmation of the social order symbolized by the ritual killing in the arena continued on into differential treatment of the corpses. Kyle also offers detailed discussion of the role of public executions within the games. On the Christians and the games, see Ville 1960 and Wiedemann 1992: 129–64.

PART II

Spectacles and Sport in Rome

CHAPTER 31

Gladiatorial Combat as Alluring Spectacle

Garrett G. Fagan

1 Introduction

It is common for modern commentators to express puzzlement at the Romans' ability to derive enjoyment from watching brutal arena spectacles, which, in their final form, included animal hunts, beast fights, public executions, and armed combat between trained professionals. The standard refrain is to emphasize how different moderns are from ancients in taking pleasure from such things. Thus Catharine Edwards in her excellent study *Death in Ancient Rome* writes, "It is hard for the modern reader not to be alienated by the idea that the sight of a man struggling against the pain of a fatal wound can constitute a source of edification and indeed visual joy" (Edwards 2007: 77). Her sentiments are echoed by Eckart Köhne: "Roman civilization and culture is never so utterly remote from our understanding as in the matter of these life-and-death games" (Köhne 2000: 12). We, it seems, are nothing like those debased spectators in their arena seats.

Armed with attitudes like this, earlier scholars have looked for the attractions of arena spectacles in various features of Roman culture and society, using anthropological, symbolic, or sociological analyses, so that gladiatorial combats have been interpreted as "liminoid rituals" that sought to curtail disorder by staging chaos under controlled conditions, as manifestations of elite Roman ideals about masculinity and proper comportment in the face of adversity, as moral parables that offered social rebirth to *infames* (those, like gladiators, who lacked good reputation) through displays of *virtus* ("manliness"), as

reminders to peacetime Romans of their proud martial heritage, or as symptoms of mass psychiatric dysfunction. Arguments along these lines, while often insightful and enlightening, confine the allure of watching gladiatorial combats to the specifics of the Roman context, and they interpose a comfortable (and comforting) distance between us and them.

I confess to finding this perplexity with the Romans' devotion to their violent spectacles, well, perplexing, because it is hardly without parallel. In the first place, ancient gladiators reimagined for the modern age continue to exert a strong pull on contemporary consumers of mass media. A film such as *Gladiator* (2000) or a television series like *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* (2010), both commercial successes, are unflinching in their portrayal of arena violence. One might infer from this that modern audiences *still* find the idea of "a man struggling against the pain of a fatal wound" engaging and enthralling, even if in vivid facsimile rather than in stark reality.

Far more significantly, even if there are no exact parallels for the Roman games per se, the historical record is hardly lacking in instances of violent spectacle – whether punitive, ludic, or religious – staged before large and appreciative crowds. Public executions are an obvious example. In the Middle Ages, tournaments, events that featured high levels of frequently lethal violence, regularly attracted numerous spectators. In Early Modern Europe boxing, cudgeling, sword fighting, and brawling were immensely popular, as were bearbaiting and dogfighting. Even today, bullfighting and dogfighting retain their attraction for certain audiences. The fastest growing spectator sport among American males aged 18–34 is mixed martial arts, also known as ultimate fighting. This sport, essentially a revival of the Greek *pankration*, can be shockingly violent.

On a less brutal plane, contact sports such as American football or rugby draw enormous crowds. In such games, violence may not be the main point of the proceedings, but it is a prominent facet of what is going on. Spectators may appreciate the artistry of a good touchdown pass, but they appreciate just as much the intensity of a good hit. Indeed, that the most savage hits have been excised from their sporting context and then sold in DVD compilations (with titles like "Moment of Impact" or "The NFL's Greatest Hits") suggests that, for some, violence is the key attraction. The same is true of ice hockey fights, film of which is also sold in the form of stand-alone compilations.

Looked at from this perspective, the Roman fascination with their games appears considerably less alien than it might at first appear. I would go further and argue that whereas the form of arena games was

unquestionably a product of the Roman historical and cultural context, the desire of the Romans to watch them was not. It speaks to something much deeper in the human psyche.

2 The Allure of Sport

Students of modern sport have posited a variety of reasons why audiences watch and engage emotionally with sporting events. Many of their ideas apply directly or indirectly to arena spectacles and merit careful consideration. All the complexities of this field cannot possibly be covered here, but a sample may be offered to illustrate the main thrusts of analysis.

In the first place, contextual factors set sport apart as a special, and hence potentially appealing, activity in which normal behavioral rules do not apply (Huizinga 1950 (1938): 1–27). Sports nearly always take place in some venue specifically designed to house them, such as a lined playing field, roped-off boxing ring, or sunken cockfighting pit. The event is thus physically set aside from everyday experience. Rituals and rules attend the spectacle and umpires or observers are often on hand to see they are properly adhered to. Spectators are familiar with these rules and rituals, and they expect the proper protocols to be followed. Athletes often wear outfits specific to the occasion – for example, American football pads, or boxing shorts and shoes – and, where applicable, they use specialized equipment, such as sticks, rackets, gloves, or modified weapons. The combined effect of these features is to lend an air of theatricality and even artificiality to the proceedings.

These observations apply equally to violent sports and even to nonsporting violent spectacles such as public executions. The latter, too, were staged at specific locations – the gallows, scaffolds, or other traditional places of execution. They were hedged about by all sorts of rituals and rules that the spectators expected to be properly enacted, and performers often wore peculiar outfits (think of the executioner's hood) and used specialized tools (the guillotine is perhaps the most infamous, but there are other examples, such as modified wagon wheels used for the vile procedure called “breaking on/with the wheel”). In this way, the entire event – whether a sporting game or a violent public ritual – was set apart as something out of the ordinary no matter how real and intense the violence of the spectacle might be. The context tells the spectator, “Here, the usual standards do not apply.”

To appreciate the determinative effect of these factors on how

people interpret what they are watching, contemplate the different consequences of beating up an opponent in a fist fight on the street outside Madison Square Garden in New York City while wearing everyday clothes, and beating up that same opponent inside Madison Square Garden, in a roped-off canvas platform while wearing shorts and special shoes and gloves. The former would be cause for arrest, fines, or social opprobrium; the latter would bring a sporting title, a sizeable purse, and respect. The context in which sport (and violence) takes place helps to establish its acceptability and to lend it cultural meaning.

Another feature of sports themselves that makes them alluring for spectators is that they present competitors with hurdles that they must strive to overcome while adhering to a set of rules. Sports entail artificial rules (no touching a ball with one's hands in soccer, for instance) that are designed to put obstacles in the way of the athletes' success (Suits 1978: 20–42). Competitors face an opposition playing by the same rules and must display a high degree of skill, determination, and endurance to succeed. The knowledgeable spectator knows what to look for in appreciating the skills, training, and artistry of the athletes as they strive for success within the confines of the rules. Furthermore, part of what is alluring about watching sport is that the spectators are familiar with the rules and expect performers to abide by them and umpires or referees to enforce them. As we all know, spectators can become very upset if the rules are flouted without penalty, or if they are enforced in a way that is judged unfair.

That the outcome of the contest is uncertain is another key feature of sport. It is usually unclear in any given encounter what will transpire and how it will transpire. Each match or game has its own dynamics, and an upset victory by an “underdog” is always a possibility.

To be sure, researchers remain unclear about the psychological mechanisms that underlie the spectators' emotional involvement in how a game plays out. Part of what is going on in watching sports live as a member of a crowd is what Durkheim dubbed “collective effervescence,” that sense of empowerment, connectedness, validation, and even euphoria people feel when sharing a mass event with like-minded fellow enthusiasts (Durkheim 2001 (1912): 154–68). Such feelings, of course, are not restricted to watching sports, and fans can get just as engaged when watching a contest alone on television. Various propositions – one hesitates to call them “theories” – have been advanced to explain this phenomenon (Fagan 2011: 197–209). One that can be called a theory, BIRGing (“Basking in Reflected Glory”), presumes that the self-esteem of spectators is raised by

association with their favored athletes' victories. Another proposition is that sport can be "representational" in the sense that spectators identify closely with athletes in the belief that the contestants represent key facets of the spectators' group identity (such as race, nationality, city of residence, etc.). Others see the keys to sport's allure in the escape from boredom or the pleasures of betting and making a profit. More recently a possible neurobiological basis for sport spectatorship has emerged with the discovery of mirror neurons in the brain. These cells fire the same way when an activity is observed as when it is performed. That is, when spectators are watching athletes, their brains may make them feel the same suspense, commitment, and drive for victory as the athletes themselves, though more research is required to confirm this possibility (Rizzalotti and Fabbri-Destro 2009; Rizzalotti and Sinigaglia 2008). In most of these approaches, either the process or the outcome of sport is seen as the key to the pleasure of watching.

3 Gladiators and Sport

The factors discussed above help make sport intensely engaging, and gladiatorial combats shared most or all of them, even if some scholars still insist that such combats lie outside the realm of sport proper (Poliakoff 1987: 7; Horsmann 2001). However, our focus here is not on issues of definition but on what brought people to watch. If gladiatorial combats appealed to spectators for many of the same reasons that sport does, then we shall have gained a very different perspective on what was going on in the arena's stands than that advanced in most studies of the phenomenon. Let us review those factors, beginning with contextual ones, with gladiatorial combats in mind.

Gladiatorial games took place in their own space, one fashioned to meet their specific requirements. The fights were held in amphitheaters, a type of building specifically designed for that purpose. Games could also be held in circuses (designed primarily for chariot racing), or stadia (used for athletic contests), or even in temporary installations set up in the forums of Roman cities (see, for example, Livy 44.18.8; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae Hadrian* 19.3; Vitruvius *On Architecture* 5.1.1). Nonamphitheatral settings, such as theaters or stadia in the Greek East, were often modified to accommodate gladiatorial spectacles (Welch 1999; see also Chapter 38 in this volume).

Above and beyond the spaces in which they took place, gladiatorial

combats themselves were replete with elements that clearly separated them from everyday experience. The spectacle opened with a procession, the *pompa*, in which the sponsor, prizes, equipment, and combatants paraded in front of the spectators (Tertullian *On Spectacles* 7.2–3; [Quintilian] *Major Declamations* 9.6; *CIL* 4.3883, 4.7993). The procession announced the official start of the spectacle, separating it from the everyday in time, just as the physical context did in space. It also gave the audience a chance to see the physical form of the men before they fought and may have aided betting. The fights appear to have begun with a blast of horns and they progressed to musical accompaniment. The gladiators wore often outlandish outfits and wielded specially designed weapons that only loosely corresponded to the sort of equipment used by actual warriors on real battlefields (Coulston 1998). Examples include the nets, tridents, and shoulder fittings (*galeri*) of the *retiarii*; the wide-brimmed helmets, thigh-high leg padding, and bent swords of the *Thraeces*; the visored helmets and arm padding (*manicae*) of the *secutores*; and, among the strangest of all, the crescent-bladed arm cuff of the *scissores* (or *arbelai*).

Gladiatorial combats presented obvious hurdles for the participants and were conducted in accordance with established rules. The details of those rules, called the *lex pugnandi*, evade us, but they must have dictated what sorts of moves were allowed, or more likely, which ones were disallowed (Carter 2006/7). As depicted in numerous arena scenes in Roman art, umpires were on hand to enforce these rules (Figure 31.1 and Figure 31.2). We know from inscriptions that gladiators trained to fight with specific combinations of arms and armor and so in specific styles that probably entailed familiar combinations of thrusts, parries, dodges, and dives to achieve victory (see, for example, *CIL* 6.4333 = *ILS* 5116 or *CIL* 6.10192 = *ILS* 5091). This is probably why particular kinds of fighters had their own followers, though we only hear of two – the *parmularii* who supported the *Thraeces*, and the *scutarii* who favored *murmillones* (Dunkle 2008: 106–7). Arena spectators were thus in a position to appreciate the skill, determination, and endurance of individual gladiators. That arena spectators were familiar with gladiatorial combat moves is revealed by casual comments in ancient literary sources that show that spectators easily recognized lackluster performances (described as “fighting by the book,” *ad dictata pugnavit*, in Petronius *Satyricon* 45.12).

Figure 31.1 Mosaic from Zliten, Libya showing a fallen gladiator appealing for *missio* while a referee restrains his opponent, third century CE. *Source:* © Gilles Mermet/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 31.2 Mosaic from Zliten, Libya showing an injured gladiator (having dropped his shield and raised his index finger) appealing for *missio*, third century CE. *Source:* © Gilles Mermet/Art Resource, NY.



The uncertainty of the outcome of gladiatorial combats was a major part of their allure. This is reflected in the facts that the skill level of individual gladiators was carefully graded based on the number of fights they had survived and that concerted efforts were made to match gladiators of similar skill levels (Potter 2010: 341–5). This was obviously meant to help ensure that combats did not consist of a grossly overmatched fighter being helplessly slaughtered but

rather presented dramatic fights between evenly matched opponents.

Gladiatorial combats were thus not the mindless butchery habitually depicted in Hollywood recreations, or the artless flailing about of men desperate to save their own skins. They appealed to audiences in large part because they were carefully thought-out contests that demanded skill and training. Gladiatorial graffiti are particularly instructive in this regard because they were etched or painted by the spectators themselves, who thus tell us directly the sorts of things they were looking for in a fight (Langner 2001; Jacobelli 2003: 39–42). Typical examples report outcomes, such as “Priscus, of the Neronian school, six fights, won; Herennius, freeborn [or freed], 18 fights, died,” (*CIL* 4.1422), or accomplishments, for example, “Albanus, left-hander, freeborn [or freed], 19 fights, won” (*CIL* 4.8056; Coleman 1996).¹ What these fans express is a concern for the status, training pedigree, and fight record of each combatant, not to mention an appreciation for the details of fighting style, such as left-handedness. This indicates that the spectators came to watch less out of raw bloodlust, as is often assumed, and more out of a desire to see exciting contests fought with style by trained experts.

Evidence left behind by the experts themselves buttresses these inferences. Epitaphs of gladiators are marked by a discernible pride in the very same categories as those prized by the spectators in their graffiti. These epitaphs identify the status and style of fighting of the deceased and record what we might term their “career stats.” Consider this epitaph, from a gravestone found in Sicily: “Flamma, *secutor*. He lived 30 years. He fought 34 times, won 21 times, drew 9 times, and was spared 4 times. Syrian by birth. Delicatus made [this tomb] for a worthy comrade-at-arms” (*CIL* 10.7297 = *ILS* 5113). The inclusion in career records like this of instances where the gladiator lost the bout but was spared (the term used is “sent,” *missus*) offers evidence of pride in performance; despite losing, he was deemed to have fought well enough to earn release on appeal. The commemorator, after all, could have just passed over those instances in silence or fudged the numbers. (On the mechanics of gladiatorial combats, see Chapter 25.) The epitaphs, then, self-identify the gladiators as a cadre of professional elite fighters who played to their public and, despite the risks, reaped substantial rewards for doing so (Hope 2000).

Gladiatorial combats, like many sports, also involved a great deal of overt showmanship. They were, in other words, constructed as spectacles, the attraction of which extended far beyond simple bloodshed. Some indication of this showmanship can be detected in images of gladiatorial fights. A famous mosaic from Zliten in Libya shows various phases of an arena spectacle. In one scene (Figure 31.1) a fallen gladiator appeals to the sponsor while his opponent has to be

physically restrained from killing him by an umpire. It may be that the victor's blood was up and he had lost track of himself – or it may be that he was putting on a good show. In another scene (Figure 31.2) an injured *murmillo*, bleeding profusely from his left thigh, turns away from the fight and appeals by raising his finger while the umpire marks a pause in the fight by stretching his rod across his back. The stance adopted by the waiting winner, a *hoplomachus*, is precisely the pose used for statues of gods and generals and is pure showmanship.

While these suggestions may be subjective interpretations of ambiguous images, clearer indications of showmanship are provided by the elaborate equipment used by gladiators, especially their heavily decorated helmets and shields. The professional fighters also used stage names, which tended to be evocative, sexy, or ironic: Ferox (“Fierce”), Iaculator (“[Net?] Thrower”), Mucro (“Blade”), Pugnax (“Fightlover”), Scorpio (“Stinger”), Velox (“Quick”), Cupido, Eros (both “Lust”), Pulcher (“Pretty Boy”), Clemens (“Merciful”), Columbus (“The Dove”), Cycnus (“The Swan”), Murranus (“Perfume Boy”), or Hilarus (“The Joker”) (Junkelmann 2008: 267–8; Ville 1981: 306–10).

We can conclude from all this that there were features of gladiatorial combat, many of them shared with other forms of sport and violent spectacle staged in different times and places, that made attendance an alluring prospect. The deeper question is: why do people like to watch violence as entertainment?

4 Psychological Processes

The numerous similarities between sport and arena spectacles offer important insight into the appeal of gladiatorial combats, but it nonetheless remains true that the public entertainments on offer in Rome were unusually, though by no means uniquely, violent. It is, therefore, important to give due consideration to the question of why watching violence was, and continues to be, popular.

The matter of why people watch violence as a diversion has attracted far less attention than it deserves since the focus has been overwhelmingly on the impact of violence in entertainment rather than on the reasons for its enduring allure (e.g., Grimes, Anderson, and Bergen 2008; Haugen 2007). The most comprehensive psychological theory to explain the attraction of violent entertainment is that of “affective dispositions,” proposed by Dolf Zillmann and his various collaborators over the past three decades or so.

“Affective dispositions” describe the attitude of spectators toward

the performers they are watching. Dispositions can be positive or negative. When good things happen to a liked agent, spectators respond with pleasure (or “euphoria,” in psychological terminology), when bad things, with distress (“dysphoria”). The inverse is also true; if an agent is disliked, spectators react euphorically when bad things happen to that agent and dysphorically when good things happen to him or her.

Two features of affective dispositions warrant emphasis. First, spectators are aware of their role as witnesses. They identify with agents to a high degree, but they also know that the agents are not actually their friends or enemies and relate to them in what are termed “parasocial relations,” which impel an audience to root for or against characters as if they were real friends or enemies. Second, a process of “moral monitoring” is constantly at work in that spectators form their attitudes about agents (their “affective dispositional alignments”) on the basis of moral assessments and then anticipate outcomes in terms of deserts. Some characters become liked by doing things judged good and are felt to “deserve” their rewards, whereas other characters are disliked because they do bad things and so deserve any misfortune that befalls them.

In dramatic contexts affective dispositions are generated through narrative structure and character development. In violent narratives, dislike of a character allows viewers to take pleasure in violence when they consider it justified. This attitude is usually brought about by dwelling on the horrific and unjustified violence of a villain prior to the hero meting out often no less horrific but justified violence to that villain. It is not the violent actions themselves that elicit enjoyment or disgust but rather who is doing what to whom and for what reason. The attitude of the viewer toward both the perpetrator and the victim converts these considerations into moral assessments of the violence as either monstrous or magnificent (Zillmann 1998, 2000).

So much for the role of affective dispositions in audience appreciation of fictional and dramatic narratives. What has this got to do with real violence done to real people as in gladiatorial combat? It has been found that affective dispositions do not distinguish between fictional and factual realms. The same mental mechanisms of disposition formation as those charted for fiction have been shown to be at work when people watch, say, the news. They empathize with agents they are positively disposed toward and feel satisfied by the sufferings and setbacks of those they dislike. Since people in the news are generally already known to the viewer, narrative structure and character development are not necessary for affective dispositions to form. Rather, viewers’ attitudes are “predeveloped” from a general knowledge of the wider context (Zillmann and Knobloch 2001).

Although the attitude of Roman spectators toward arena performers can only be surmised from scattered scraps of evidence, the character of the arena context prompts some general suggestions. To begin with, given that gladiators were generally low-status individuals, and given the announcement of an event's details in advance, it is reasonable to assume that spectator attitudes were largely predeveloped and tended to the negative. It is also likely that the crowd's attitudes varied with the phases of the spectacle. Even a cursory review of arena personnel is enough to make this probable since they included animals, professional huntsmen, helpless execution victims, forced mass combatants, trained and professional gladiators, volunteer fighters, and occasionally also athletes and mock fighters. It is highly unlikely, on the face of it, that the crowd adopted a uniform emotional orientation toward all of these performers and victims. Rather, their attitudes shifted in response to developments on the sand – and that in itself would make attendance at arena spectacles a dynamic and exciting psychological experience.

As to the gladiators in particular, it is not obvious how spectator attitudes formed and operated as they watched since our evidence is so patchy. As far as we can tell, gladiators did not adopt the flamboyant “good guy/bad guy” personae of, say, modern professional wrestlers, whose moral virtues and failings (and ongoing vendettas) generate dramatic narratives around which spectator attitudes can readily form. As we have just seen, however, gladiatorial epitaphs and graffiti, as well as surviving advertisements for spectacles, identify the gladiator, his style of fighting, his status or training school, and his fight record to date – all details that clearly mattered to the arena fan. Might it be that they helped establish ongoing narratives that predeveloped spectator attitudes for or against individual gladiators?

In the case of M. Attilius, a particularly dramatic narrative is revealed in a series of graffiti about him etched into the wall of a tomb outside the Nucerian Gate at Pompeii.

The first text reads: “M. Attilius, beginner, won; Hilarus, of the Neronian school, 14 fights, 12 crowns, spared” (*CIL* 4.10238). Attilius was a freeborn (or freedman) volunteer fighter (*auctoratus*), as his name and lack of training school affiliation demonstrate. He was a newcomer (*tiro*) who, in his very first fight, went up against the professionally trained Hilarus, a veteran of 14 fights with 13 wins under his belt – an apparent gross mismatch. Yet Attilius won in an upset victory. That Hilarus was “sent” (*missus*) tells us that both men put on a good show. Attilius's next appearance was no less dramatic: “M. Attilius, one fight, one crown, won; L. Raecius Felix, 12 fights, 12 crowns, spared” (*CIL* 4.10236). This bout pitched Attilius against a free volunteer gladiator like himself, but this time an unbeaten

veteran of 12 fights. Yet again, despite the apparent mismatch, Attilius emerged victorious, and again his defeated opponent was spared – another good fight with an upset at the end. It does not take much to imagine how exciting Attilius's explosive debut on the local arena circuit must have been. That the graffittist diligently updated Attilius's fight record for the second bout shows that Attilius's performance was being carefully tracked, as was that of his opponents. These details may have built dramatic narratives of sorts around each gladiator.

We can only make suggestions as to how dispositions functioned at the Roman arena since the details remain elusive and we cannot poll the spectators or observe them in their seats. A recent analysis of the emotional dynamics inherent in violent encounters may help to fill out the picture. This model, developed by the sociologist Randall Collins (2008), suggests that an emotional field of tension and fear imbues all confrontations. Violence may then be defined as a set of pathways around confrontational tension and fear, in that it can only occur once these emotional barriers have been overcome. When real violence does occur, most people prove incompetent at it, flailing about ineffectually in face-to-face fights or firing their weapons wildly in combat. The incompetence is generated by unresolved tension and fear, which is why most fights are as much about bravado and bluster as they are about inflicting genuine harm.

The two chief means for reducing confrontational tension/fear are, first, attacking the weak, and, second, setting boundaries on how the violence plays out by, for instance, establishing rules for staged fights. Trained fighters, who mutually agree to the rules, can then engage in high levels of violence within the confines of those rules. Furthermore, in most societies trained fighters are admired as an elite caste – think of the instant respect accorded a person who identifies themselves as a black belt in the martial arts. This is especially the case among those who turn out to watch them perform. Indeed, the presence of an enthusiastic audience has a demonstrable effect on prolonging and intensifying staged fights as the combatants and the spectators are emotionally synchronized (what Collins terms “mutually entrained”) in that they all share knowledge of the rules and protocols of the fight. The more enthusiastic and supportive the spectators, the more competent, intense, and prolonged the fight tends to be.

The mutual emotional “entrainment” of the spectators with the fighters implies important consequences for the experience of watching gladiatorial combats. In gladiatorial combats, as we have seen, the crowd was familiar with the rules and with the moves of the fighters. Gladiators, despite their social debasement, were widely admired by their fans as a breed apart (although that admiration was always contingent upon performance). The more aggressively the

gladiators fought, the more the audience would encourage them, which would itself prolong the fight and increase the level of aggression on display. Gladiators knew that they had to put on a show of fighting skill to meet the crowd's approval; doing so was literally a matter of life and death and, if their epitaphs are any indication, also of pride among their peers. Gladiator and spectator were thus partners in the arena's dance of violence, each playing a role in its lethal choreography.

It seems likely, then, that in addition to the sportlike features of gladiatorial combats already reviewed, a large part of the enjoyment and thrill of watching gladiatorial bouts rested in the spectators' disposition for or against particular fighters or types of fighter set against the overall emotional synchrony between performer and audience established by everyone's knowledge of the rules governing the fights and the quality of the combat moves used to achieve victory.

We may conclude from all this that there were lures of the arena that stood outside the specific cultural context of ancient Rome; lures that can be documented from quite divergent historical environments. The Roman fascination with gladiatorial combat is therefore hardly "incomprehensible" or "alienating." Watching it was a dynamic psychological and emotional experience akin to watching sport, particularly combat sports. Gladiatorial bouts shared features with most types of sporting action. Spectators got behind particular fighters, felt emotionally synchronized with both the performers and the rest of the audience, and became engaged in the action as the fighters struggled within the confines of a known set of rules to achieve victory. They watched because they were like us, not because we are unlike them.²

ABBREVIATIONS

CIL: Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

ILS: Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae

NOTES

¹ All translations of ancient texts are my own.

² An important caveat: in stating this, I am not making a reductionist claim that ancient spectators and modern sports fans are alike in every respect, let alone that their experience of spectatorship was identical. Matters of historical and cultural context, the meaning(s) they assign to what they watch, and the

broad divergences in social experience and cultural values ensure that there are important differences between each case. The underlying mental mechanics involved in watching sport, however, are likely to be constant since ancients and moderns share the same brain physiology and the mental architecture that it generates.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The arguments articulated in this essay are based on those presented more fully in my book (Fagan 2011). Stimulating surveys and interpretations of Roman arena games are to be found in Barton 1993: 3–81; Hopkins 1983: 1–30; Kyle 1998 and 2007: 251–339; Plass 1995: 3–77; Potter 2010; Toner 1995: 34–52; Ville 1981; and Wiedemann 1992: 1–101. Still worth reading is Balsdon 1969: 288–313. Closely researched reconstructions of Roman gladiatorial armatures are to be found in Junkelmann 2008 (with plenty of color photographs). Ancient sources, including graffiti, are handily collected in translation in Futrell 2006, and original texts of relevant inscriptions can be traced in the pages of *CIL*, or in *ILS* 5083–162, or in the seven volumes (and counting) of *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'occidente Romano* (usually abbreviated *EAOR*).

For gladiators in modern culture, see Winkler 2004. A useful

survey of ancient attitudes toward violent entertainments as expressed by early imperial authors is provided by Wistrand 1992.

On public executions, see Abbott 2006; Bastien 1996; Evans 1996; Merback 1999; van Dülmen 1990. On the Medieval tournament, see Barker 1986; Carter 1981; Flori 1998; Hardy 1974; and Keen 1984. Early Modern combat sports are described in Guttman 1986: 53–82; Guttman 2004: 52–76; and Malcolmson 1973: 42–51. On bullfights, see Mitchell 1991 and Shubert 1999.

Theories about the allure of sport are offered by Guttman 1986: 175–85; Goldstein 1989; Russell 1993; and Wann, Melnick, Russell, *et al.* 2001.

Studies of Roman amphitheaters, and the seating dispositions within them, can be found in Bomgardner 2000; Golvin 1988; and Welch 2007. On gladiatorial armatures, see Junkelmann 2000 and 2008: 43–128.

For the psychology of spectatorship, especially affective dispositions and their functioning in watching violent entertainment, see Zillmann 1998, 2000; Zillmann and Cantor 1976; Zillmann and Vorderer 2000. Collins's fascinating study of the dynamics built into violent encounters (Collins 2008) makes for enlightening reading.

CHAPTER 32

Women with Swords

Female Gladiators in the Roman World

Stephen Brunet

1 Introduction

Women figure prominently in the Roman games that Cecil B. DeMille staged for his film *The Sign of the Cross* (1932). Scantly clothed girls struggle to escape before they are mauled by ferocious animals. Wild-looking women face off against dwarfs dressed to imitate African pygmies and, with two kills to the dwarfs' one, the women clearly will be the victors. Cameos of women in the stands further depict the excesses of Nero's Rome: one wife, bored with the slaughter, consults the program with her husband, another gazes with a mixture of horror and lustful anticipation, and a third is more interested in flirting with the young men sitting next to her.

DeMille's decision to feature women in his depiction of Nero's games in *The Sign of the Cross* was not purely an act of imagination, but it was far from being historically accurate. That is understandable in a movie intended to entertain a modern audience, but scholars have sometimes been affected by the same tendency toward imaginative recreation of female participation in the games. DeMille's film serves as a reminder that it is all too easy to let our preconceptions and fantasies mislead us. We must, therefore, carefully examine what the ancient sources actually tell us about the women who fought in the arena. This is the only way to arrive at reliable answers to such questions as whether female gladiators were a common feature of the Roman games and why the Romans valued gladiatorial combats involving women. Moreover, what we learn about the women who

fought in the arena, the women who came to watch the shows, and even the women who fantasized about being gladiators can help us understand Roman concepts of masculinity and the connections between the Roman games and the structure of Roman society. It is also informative to ask if the Romans thought women should be spectators of the violence that filled the arena and, if not, why not?

2 What Do We Know?

This essay focuses on the women who took on a function in the games normally performed by men, either by fighting as gladiators or *venatores*, “beast hunters.” DeMille was not far off the mark in believing that women were sentenced to be savaged by beasts in a sexually explicit fashion (Coleman 1990; Frankfurter 2009; see also Chapter 35 in this volume). However, these criminals should not be confused with gladiators (see the essays by Dunkle and Fagan, Chapters 25 and 31 respectively), and these incidents tell us little about the women who actually fought in the arena except that the Romans were not automatically opposed to seeing women killed publically.¹

The earliest datable instance of women risking their lives in the arena as gladiators or *venatores* took place during Nero’s reign and was reported by two historians who felt that what happened in the Roman games reflected the nature of an emperor’s rule (see Chapters 27 and 30). In this case, Dio Cassius and Tacitus connected the incident with what they perceived to be a general licentiousness precipitated by Nero’s excessive interest in the games. Their accounts differ slightly on a few points. Dio Cassius indicates that upper-class men and women performed in plays, drove chariots, fought as gladiators, and hunted beasts (61.17.3–4). Tacitus only mentions that they appeared in the arena (*Annals* 15.32). According to Dio, some of the participants performed willingly and others quite unwillingly. Tacitus does not mention this detail, but he notes elsewhere that a request from an emperor like Nero would not have been easy to refuse, especially given Nero’s desire to perform in public (*Annals* 14.14; cf. Juvenal *Satires* 8.198–9). The important element for both historians was not that Nero had offered shows involving female gladiators; instead they found it degrading for anyone of the senatorial or equestrian classes to appear in front of an audience in any capacity. Romans watched spectacles; they did not perform in them.

We next hear of women fighting in the arena in connection with the emperor Titus’s inauguration of the Colosseum. The show was a

massive affair with staged sea battles, gladiatorial combats, and the slaughter of nine thousand animals, some at the hands of women. They were, as Dio carefully noted, not of high status (66.25.1–2). The poet Martial refers to this same event in two short poems commemorating these games (*Spectacles* 7–8). The first describes how it was not enough for Mars to serve the emperor, but now Venus does as well, meaning, in prosaic terms, that having men fight in the arena was to be expected, but Titus had expanded this to include women. The second poem makes clear exactly what wonderful deeds these women had accomplished. In the past Hercules was known for killing the Nemean lion, but now the audience had seen the same feat done by a woman's hand. So we are not dealing here with female gladiators but with female *venatores* assigned to kill the beasts collected for Titus's show. (On staged animal hunts, see Chapter 34.)

Domitian, Titus's brother and successor, was responsible for having women appear in his shows on two occasions (Dio Cassius 67.8.1–9.1; Suetonius *Domitian* 4). One incident – the inclusion in the Capitoline Games of a running race for girls modeled on the Heraia at Olympia – is not relevant here since it concerns women's role in Greek athletics rather than the Roman games (see Chapter 16). Regarding the other occasion, we are told that the remarkable aspects of Domitian's games included nighttime contests, along with matches involving dwarfs and women. (Suetonius does not mention the dwarfs.) Domitian drew censure for other aspects of his games. For example, Dio criticized him for making the audience sit through a storm while he was safely bundled in a cloak. Domitian's use of women in the arena, however, provoked no editorializing from either author.

This incident was undoubtedly the inspiration for DeMille's contest between women and dwarfs, and, without the testimony provided by the poet Statius, DeMille's version might seem historically justified. In one poem in the *Silvae* (1.6), Statius sought to list all the wonderful things that Domitian had provided the Roman people as part of a holiday celebration. Midway through the day, women, described as the gender inexperienced in warfare, enacted a fight characteristic of men, and Statius claimed that you would think you were watching Amazons (ll. 51–6). The women may have been costumed like Amazons so the audience would not miss the point. Next, dwarfs appeared to face a flock of cranes, re-creating a well-known incident from Greek mythology in which pygmies in Egypt fought off an invasion of cranes (ll. 57–64). This sight amused the gods Mars and Virtue.

A close look at Statius's depiction makes it very clear that the women did not fight the dwarfs but each other (a careful reading of Dio shows the same point; see Brunet 2003).² The women were

gladiators; they are literally described as being “ignorant of the sword.”³ The dwarfs were not armed at all but specialized in staging boxing matches. It was the incongruity of these dwarfs trying to use their martial art skills to subdue a group of cranes that led Mars and Virtue to laugh. In contrast, the first part of the show was a serious affair and intended to provoke amazement that women could take on the role of men, the only precedent for which derived from the mythical Amazons. No other evidence suggests that women ever fought dwarfs, so there is no historical basis for DeMille’s reconstruction. Nevertheless, DeMille shows us why such a battle would not have worked well in the Roman games. Dwarfs would have been no match for women, and such a contest would have been a dull show.

Women gladiators were not just restricted to Rome, although the evidence comes from archaeological material, not literary sources. Most famous by far is a marble relief, originally from Halicarnassos (see [Map 32.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay) and now in the British Museum ([Figure 32.1](#)). It depicts two women facing each other, both wearing the moderately heavy armor associated with a type of gladiator called a *provocator* (Junkelmann 2008: fig. 17). One of them holds her sword in her left hand, a difficult stance against which to defend. Close examination reveals that they wore loincloths and protection across their stomachs. Their chests, however, were bare, exposing their breasts. Inscribed in Greek are their stage names, Amazon and Achillia, designed to recall, respectively, the famous warrior women of mythology and Achilles, the greatest warrior of the Trojan War. Also inscribed is the note “They were released.” (On the mechanics of gladiatorial combat, including the “releasing” of defeated gladiators, see Chapter 25.) Little is known about the archaeological context from which this relief came, and, as a result, we cannot accurately determine its date.

Map 32.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



Figure 32.1 Marble Relief from Halicarnassos showing female gladiators, first to second century CE. *Source:* British Museum GR 1847.4–24.19, © Trustees of the British Museum.



The women have often been assumed to have fought without helmets so that their gender would have been clear to the audience. This would have been exceedingly unusual since only the lightly armed *retiarii*, “netfighters,” regularly fought with their faces visible. Coleman (2000) realized that their helmets can in fact be seen behind them, and that the artist included this detail to indicate how exceptional this match had been. If neither gladiator in a match could get the upper hand, both of them could be released and would earn the rare designation *stans missio*, “released while still standing.” Such a tie was considered the ultimate demonstration of martial valor and that is exactly what was being commemorated in the relief: the two women had removed their helmets once the match was declared a tie. The magistrate who had provided the spectacle then set up this monument to remind his fellow citizens of his generosity.

A similar monument, in this case an inscription, was discovered in the excavations at Ostia, the port of Rome. In a partially preserved section of the text, the magistrate, Hostilianus, boasted of having been the first one since the founding of Rome “to provide women for the sword” (EAOR 4.29). While “for the sword” might mean that these women were destined simply to be executed, it more likely indicates that they fought as gladiators in the games Hostilianus hosted at Ostia. We can assume that these women were not of high status since they

are called *mulieres*, “females.” The document is usually dated to the mid-second century CE on the grounds that it must have taken place before the emperor Septimius Severus banned performances by women at the end of the second century (Cébeillac-Gervasoni and Zevi 1976: 614).

Septimius Severus’s edict was occasioned by an athletic contest that included both men and women. The female athletes competed so fiercely that, for some reason that Dio does not explain, women of noble status also came under ridicule (75.16.1). As a result, women of any social status were no longer allowed to fight against each other (*monomachein*). The verb *monomachein* is the regular term in Greek for fighting as a gladiator but the ban clearly resulted from the action of female athletes at an athletic contest. It is difficult, therefore, to decide if the ban applied to athletic contests, gladiatorial shows, or both. What is clear is that performances by women of low status were not viewed negatively in themselves but, as was often the case with edicts involving the games, the Romans took action when what happened on stage or in the arena was believed to have deleterious effects upon spectators or outside the world of the games.

Another much earlier edict involving women and the Roman games was discovered in Larinum, in southeastern Italy. This edict is a *SC* (*Senatus Consultum*, “decree of the Roman Senate”) that was passed in 19 CE, during the reign of Tiberius (*EAOR* 3.2). It was one of several attempts to limit the appearance by members of the senatorial or equestrian classes on the stage or in the arena. The *SC* from Larinum likely closed certain loopholes by listing anyone who might remotely fall under the restrictions, women included. For example, the provisions applied to “any woman whose husband, father, grandfather, or brother had ever had the right to sit with the equestrians at the games.” The effort made to publish this *SC* outside Rome indicates that the Senate felt the willingness of some members of the upper class to perform publicly was undermining the traditional structure of society. Dio, Suetonius, and Tacitus concur about the existence of this problem, and they provide several examples of men who fought or tried to fight as gladiators in the decades leading up to the edict (Levick 1983: 105–14). When it came to problems involving women, though, these authors fault them only for appearing on stage or engaging in flagrant adultery. This suggests that no upper-class women had yet tried to become gladiators, but the framers of the *SC* were attempting to cover every eventuality, extrapolating from the crimes already committed by men to cover women as well.

Female gladiators also pop up in the world of fiction. One brief mention occurs in the *Satyricon* (45), a novel usually attributed to

Petronius, a member of Nero's court. At a dinner party near Puteoli, just north of Naples, one of the guests, Echion, is ridiculed for being the archetypical fan of the arena, obsessed with the minutiae of the games provided by local magistrates. Echion expects an upcoming show to be particularly lavish because it will include a female *essedaria*. This uncommon type of gladiator derived its name from Celtic warriors who fought from chariots. In practice, though, an *essedarius* fought on foot and was distinguished by the use of an oval shield and helmet decorated with two feathers (Junkelmann 2008: 116–19). The women on the relief from Halicarnassos wear equally heavy armor, so we should not think this female *essedaria* was entirely the product of Petronius's imagination. Echion describes her as a *mulier*, "female," the same term used in Hostilianus's inscription. So we are not to envisage her as being of high status. Most importantly, we can conclude from Echion's excitement that spectators considered it a rare treat to see women risk their lives in the arena.

Another glancing reference comes in Juvenal's list of all the ways the world's proper order had been perverted. First up is a eunuch who had taken a wife, followed by a woman named Mevia who, dressed like an Amazon (with one breast bare), participated in a staged boar hunt in the arena (*Satires* 1.22–3). While Mevia's name suggests an aristocratic background, Juvenal's comments in another poem suggest that her gender was also an issue. In his famous attack on the faults of women, mainly sexual, Juvenal complains about a baby that looks like a gladiator, not its noble father, and then about Eppia, a noble woman who, oddly aroused by a gladiator's wounds, had forsaken her family to run off with him (6.80–114). Later, Juvenal pities a husband whose wife plays at being a gladiator, training in full armor and loving to act like a man but never really wanting to be one. Not even the wife of a gladiator would have endured such training (6.246–67). Finally, a certain Ogulnia wastes the family fortune so she can go to the games in style and then gives her last bit of wealth to a good looking athlete, a type of performer Juvenal despised nearly as much as he did gladiators (6.352–6).

Juvenal was not alone in his belief that noble women "loved the sword" (6.112). Graffiti at Pompeii refer to gladiators, possibly jokingly, as heartthrobs of the girls (Garraffoni 2008: 230). Dubious stories circulated about how Messalina, Claudius's wife, and Faustina, mother of Commodus, became enamored of gladiators (Dio Cassius 60.28.2; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae Marcus* 19). This idea that noble women could not keep their hands off lowborn types was a commonplace in Roman thought (Braund 1992; Edwards 1997: 78–81). A similar belief probably underlies the popular claim made by many modern authors that the wealthy woman found buried in the

gladiatorial barracks at Pompeii was there to visit her lover, one of the gladiators. Yet excavators found more than fifty other skeletons, including those of children and dogs, in the same location, so this woman was probably one of the many people who had taken refuge in the building while trying to escape via the nearby Stabian Gate (Richardson 1988: 85–6; Kyle 1998: 85). The most important thing to remember, though, about the complaints made about women and the games is that they are concerned nearly exclusively with the effects of the games outside the arena. When it came to woman actually performing in the arena, Mevia is the sole example in the long list of errant women censured by Juvenal and, in Juvenal's opinion, her misbehavior warranted less than two lines of comment.

3 Problematic Evidence

Our earliest source concerning female gladiatorial combat, if we understood the context, would be a passage from Nicolaus of Damascus, a historian and philosopher who was active in the first century BCE. Nicolaus's work survives only in fragments, but he is quoted in a later source (Athenaeus 154a) as having reported that two unnamed individuals commanded in their wills that, in one case, his most beautiful female slaves and, in the other, his favorite young boy slaves should fight at their funerals. These wills were ostensibly abrogated as being unlawful. The vagueness of the account should give us pause for thought. No women (or young boys) were ever actually forced to take up a sword. The men responsible for these wills are not named nor is any date given. We are not told whether it was illegal for women and boys to become gladiators at this time or whether it was illegal to make one's own slaves do so. Tantalizing as it may be, Nicolaus's testimony does not advance our understanding of when or how the Romans came to think it would be a good idea to watch women fight.

Vesley (1998) has proposed that the *collegia iuvenum*, an institution developed during the Roman Empire to provide education and physical training for aristocratic youth, became a major training ground for the many upper-class girls who wanted to enter the arena. The idea that girls were regularly admitted to these schools rests on the slim testimony of three fragmentary inscriptions. Equally problematic is the underlying assumption, which I will later show to be false, that a large number of upper-class girls wanted to become gladiators. So there is no need to search for some special mechanism like the *collegia iuvenum* that would have allowed them to take up a

profession disapproved of by their parents and society. A more reasonable view is that women became gladiators by the same paths as men. They were slaves who were sold or, if free, surrendered themselves to a *lanista*, the manager of a gladiatorial school, and thereby received the training that would give them a chance of surviving in the arena. This is the implication of the report that the emperor Hadrian forbade the sale of a male or female slave to a *lanista* or to a pimp unless the master provided a reason (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae Hadrian* 18).

A BBC program *Gladiator Girl* (*Gladiatrix* on the Discovery Channel) has made widely popular the idea that the remains of a female gladiator had been found during excavations outside Roman London. The impulse for making this claim is again the assumption that women regularly fought in arenas throughout the Roman world and hence it should be just a matter of time before archaeologists turn up the tomb of a female gladiator. The actual identification in this case, though, is based on tenuous evidence, essentially that the grave goods included a lamp with the representation of a fallen gladiator and the cones of the stone pine, a tree believed to be associated with the amphitheater. Given the popularity of gladiatorial scenes on small objects like lamps and the use of these pinecones in other rituals, the identification of the occupant of this grave as a gladiator would require something rather more substantial. For example, we might have expected the bones to show signs of wounds like those noticed during the excavation at Ephesos of a gladiator graveyard (Kanz and Grossschmidt 2005). Even better would be the typical gladiator's tombstone indicating her specialty and perhaps the reason she lost her last match.

4 The Phenomenon of Female Gladiators

Barring new archaeological discoveries, our understanding of the women who fought in the arena must be based on the evidence we have at hand: five certain cases in which women fought in front of an audience (three at Rome, two elsewhere), several possible references to the legal issues involving women as gladiators, and two brief appearances in fiction. Since the essential feature of female gladiators was that they were *not* men, a useful approach in analyzing our evidence is to catalog all the things these women were not. First, the Romans never used the term *gladiatrix*. Similarly, the term *ludia*

referred not to a female gladiator or beast hunter but to a gladiator's wife or concubine.⁴ In fact, Hostilianus's awkward "He provided women for the sword" suggests that the Romans never developed a standardized terminology to describe female gladiators because they were not a sufficiently common phenomenon. Second, women did not always appear as gladiators. A substantial proportion probably functioned as *venatores* like the women who starred in the Colosseum's inauguration. Trying to kill a boar might have seemed less dangerous and better suited for a woman than learning to fight in heavy armor. Moreover, the Romans surprisingly had no interest in seeing women perform as charioteers, an area where women had a reasonable chance of holding their own against men.

Watching women lose to men was not where the Romans' interest in female gladiators lay. The paradigm we should use for female gladiators is the Halicarnassos relief – two equally well-armed women faced off against each other, using all the skills at their disposal to beat the other. Such a contest fits a principle inherent in staging gladiatorial matches: fighters were supposed to be well matched in terms of weaponry and level of training. Seneca, for example, remarks that a gladiator considered it a source of shame to have to face an inferior (*On Providence* 3.4). A match between a female and a male gladiator would have been innately uneven, and none of our sources mention such an inappropriate contest. The same reasoning applies to matches between women and dwarfs but in reverse. As DeMille sensed when choreographing his battle, the women would have easily overwhelmed the dwarfs and the result would have been laughable.

One thing that the sources agree on is that female gladiators were not a joke. The dwarfs in Domitian's games may have provoked a laugh, but Statius is quite clear that the women's willingness to fight like Amazons was met with amazement. Statius's suggestion that they were a reincarnation of the Amazons indicates why the Romans thought it was worthwhile to train women to fight even though men were better suited for the job. The games provided women an opportunity to transcend their nature and, like their mythological predecessors, do deeds of which only men were considered capable. So Statius remarks on how the female gender, although inexperienced at warfare, undertook "manly battles." Martial extols Titus for having brought it about that the deeds of Hercules were now accomplished by "a woman's hand." The names of the two gladiators on the Halicarnassos relief were thus no accident. The magistrate wanted people to remember that he had arranged for the ultimate test of feminine military ability: a personification of the famous warrior women against a female version of the greatest fighter of Greek mythology.

The astonishment produced by seeing such women fight would have brought with it an important lesson. If women could, on special occasions, show the sort of courage and martial determination that Romans viewed as being essential characteristics of men, then men should be inspired to do the same or better. The rationale for using women in this fashion fits well with a major theory regarding why the Romans valued the games as a whole (Wiedemann 1992: 38). On this model, which finds support in the work of several Roman authors, Romans were supposed to be inspired to be better by watching these martial exercises, especially the displays of fortitude by gladiators and others who ranked at the bottom end of Roman society. So, for instance, Pliny praised Trajan's games for inspiring "men to endure honorable wounds and have contempt for death since a love of glory and desire for victory was discernible even in the case of slaves and criminals" (*Panegyric* 33.1). Admittedly, novelty must have also played some part in the Roman fascination with the women who risked their lives in the arena. Yet it was not the novelty of women ridiculously pretending to be gladiators but the novelty of seeing women fully assuming the role normally held by men with all the risks that entailed.

Apparently the belief that female gladiators were commonplace is hard to give up. A recent study, for example, suggests that female gladiators were more widespread than our sources would suggest because authors overlooked examples, especially early ones (McCullough 2007/8). Yet Suetonius and Dio Cassius, our best sources for the games during the first century of the Empire, are not likely to have overlooked the use of women in the games by an emperor such as Caligula or Claudius. More importantly, our evidence actually speaks to the comparative rarity of female participants. Suetonius and Dio mention the appearance of women in Titus' and Domitian's games because they viewed it as exceptional. Dio, in particular, is very clear that female *venatores* were as unusual and noteworthy as the mock sea battles, the horses that swam in the flooded Colosseum, or the other "amazing things" arranged for the Colosseum's inauguration. Further, the Roman games were a highly popular subject in art, but female gladiators show up neither in mosaics, the medium in which wealthy givers of games recorded their generosity, nor on lamps, the inexpensive memorabilia that testify to the popularity of the games throughout the Roman world. The complete absence of female gladiators from the world of art (other than the Halicarnassos relief) testifies to their rarity.⁵ How infrequently women appeared in the arena can be judged from the pride that Hostilianus took in being the first – at a rather late date – to provide women for the games in Ostia, the closest major center to Rome and not a backwater of the Empire.

Thus Petronius was right to assume that seeing a woman fight in the arena was an unusual treat, even near Naples, an area noted for its numerous amphitheaters.

Our evidence for upper-class women fighting as gladiators or hunting animals in the arena is even more tenuous. The SC from Larinum is at best inconclusive, and it is hard to make much of Juvenal's glancing reference to the fictional *venator* Mevia. The only occasion when we can say for certain that the Romans saw noble women perform in the arena is under Nero, and this was partially a result of coercion. While we might hold a romantic view of gladiators, the fact that Nero had to force nobles to take part in his games suggests that senators and equestrians of both genders generally found performing in the arena an unattractive option. So while a senator's wife might like to play at being a gladiator, as Juvenal claims, the likelihood of seeing an upper-class woman actually perform in the arena was probably nonexistent.

Whether women had fought in the arena before Nero's reign is hard to tell. On the one hand, beginning with Julius Caesar, the resources of the Roman state were increasingly harnessed to produce novel and astounding displays such as mock sea battles and exhibitions of strange animals. In this context, the idea of introducing "Amazons" into the arena would have made sense. The silence, though, of Suetonius and Dio should make us hesitate about making any specific claims. It is likewise hard to tell whether Septimius Severus's edict actually meant the end of female gladiators. We do not have enough information about the later history of the Roman games to determine if the decree even applied to women who fought as gladiators or only to female athletes, much less whether it was enforced. This is an area in which new archaeological discoveries could be most helpful.

5 Women as Spectators

The Roman games were spectator sports par excellence. If nobody saw the show that Titus mounted for the inauguration of the Colosseum, if nobody came to the games offered to the citizens of Ostia by Hostilianus, the rationale behind the games would have been destroyed. The question then arises: if it was considered good to watch women fight, was it considered good for women themselves to watch the games? A simple answer is that even if women wanted to see the games, the opportunity to do so was greatly restricted once Augustus introduced his law regulating seating at the games. Prior to this time

men and women were not kept apart; the dictator Sulla was able to meet his future wife at a gladiatorial exhibition held in the Forum (Plutarch *Sulla* 35.3–5). Also, not long before this law was passed, the poet Ovid could recommend the circus and the gladiatorial games as good places to pick up girls (*Art of Love* 1.135–76). Augustus's law extended existing regulations that reserved seats for equestrians and senators at the theater (mentioned in the SC from Larinum) to venues like the arena. He further divided the seating to reflect his conception of how Roman society should be arranged. Among a multitude of smaller divisions, he reserved sections for married men, boys, and their tutors. In this scheme, women were relegated to the back, as far up and away from the action as possible. By Nero's time, with two exceptions mentioned below, it would no longer have been possible, as DeMille implies, for young women to sit in the front rows and flirt with the men around them.

This reorganization was not primarily designed to shield women from the immoral influences of the games, as Edmondson asserts (2002: 49). Otherwise, the Vestal Virgins and the female members of the emperor's family would not have been allotted front row seats where they would have been most vulnerable to any corrupting influence (Rawson 1987: 91). The key to understanding the change is to realize that what went on in the stands was as much a part of the show as what happened in the arena. The games came to function as a way of demonstrating to the Romans and to their subjects how society should be organized and where the power lay. For the same reason, Augustus required all citizens to wear the toga and other ceremonial garb in order to reinforce visually the idea that the audience was a model of Roman society (see Chapter 30). At least from a political and military point of view, women did not have a major position in this scheme. The other important point is that one of the lessons Romans thought was learned from watching the games – the value of fortitude and endurance in battle – was not aimed at women. Therefore, to the degree that women were extraneous to what went on at the games, there was no need to provide a prominent place for them in the audience.

The Romans, however, were not entirely blind to the potentially corrupting effects of the Roman games on women. Augustus delayed a boxing match because the athletes' nudity was unsuitable for the women in the audience (Suetonius *Augustus* 44). Juvenal is our best guide as to why some Romans might worry about women watching the games. As noted, his real concern was not with women who performed in the arena but with cases in which the line between the world of entertainment and world outside the arena had been blurred. So he attacks a Roman wife for running off with a gladiator, someone

she should have never met. Another Roman wife is criticized for spending all her time training in a gladiatorial school, a place where men could gain instruction in the use of weapons without suffering reproach, but a woman had no business being. As a result of their misplaced interests, both of these women neglected their duties as wives and mothers. The authors of the *SC* from Larinum seem to have shared Juvenal's concern that there were dangers in allowing women to frequent gladiatorial schools. One provision prohibits them from assisting gladiators with their armor (if this is the meaning) or "undertaking any other service."

Juvenal sensed that if a woman showed an interest in gladiators, and especially if she wanted to have contact with men of such low status, something had to be at work besides an interest in their military prowess. Unlike men, women were not supposed to be attracted to weapons and combat. The whole world of warfare was presumed to be alien to them, and therefore illicit sex could have been the only thing they had on their minds. Yet, paradoxically, the reason that the Romans believed women should not be interested in watching gladiators – their lack of a warlike nature and their inability to endure hardship – was also the reason they were so effective when they appeared in the arena. Taking part in the games, an activity normally open only to men, allowed women a chance to overcome the limitations of their feminine nature. They were thereby able to teach the men who watched them to be more like men.

ABBREVIATIONS

EAOR = *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'Occidente romano* (1988–). Rome. 7 vols. (to date).

NOTES

1 Also not considered here are shows such as a hunt during Nero's reign that involved numerous Ethiopians, including women and children (Dio Cassius 63.3.1–2). Hunting native animals was their traditional occupation, and the participation of women was not unusual.

2 Duke (1955) believes that women never fought dwarfs, but he does not believe that the dwarfs in Domitian's show could have performed as boxers.

3 All translations of ancient texts found in this essay are my own.

4 Watson and Watson (1996) convincingly argue that *ludia* did not mean a woman who performed publically, as long thought, but a

woman who belonged to the *ludus*, the gladiatorial school. While they suggest otherwise, we have sufficient evidence for the existence of a family life among gladiators to justify the translation as “wife” in the passages from Juvenal discussed above so long as we remember that in a strict sense gladiators, normally being slaves, could not legally marry.

5 Manas 2011 appeared after this entry was complete and cannot be addressed here in detail. His major claim concerns a statuette long thought to represent a female athlete with a strigil. He thinks that she is actually holding the bent sword typically used by Thracian gladiators. I do not find his arguments, notably his claim that her minimal clothing indicates she fought in the arena, to be particularly compelling.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Brunet (Brunet, 2004, with Brunet 2003 on dwarf boxers) demonstrates that women never fought dwarfs and reviews in detail the evidence for female gladiators and *venatores*. McCullough (2007/8) does not add to the evidence but provides an accessible introduction, although Roman authors are not likely to have overlooked appearances by women in the arena during the Early Empire as she claims. Duke (1955) (not cited in Brunet 2003) does not believe that the dwarfs in Domitian's show could have performed as boxers, although he provides no substantial arguments for that belief.

The literary evidence is often connected to wider issues. For Juvenal and the theme of the adulterous wife, see Braund (1992). Kleijwegt (1998) explores how Petronius used the gladiatorial games to highlight Echion's and Trimalchio's lack of sophistication. Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum* is dealt with in detail in Coleman (2006). On Suetonius' and Dio Cassius's value as sources for the games, see Chapter 27.

The Halicarnassos relief of Amazon and Achillia is often illustrated, but many descriptions fail to take into account Coleman's essential analysis (2000).

Levick (1983) provides an English translation of the SC from Larinum and a review of cases where upper-class Romans performed publically. Lebek (1990, 1991) provides the most thorough evaluation. McGinn (1992) argues that the SC and preceding legislation had no connection with adultery or prostitution by upper-class women. Edmondson (2002) provides an accessible overview of the restrictions on seating at the games. Rawson (1987) lays out the evidence for Augustus's edict on seating, the *Lex Julia Theatralis*.

Fighting as a gladiator is included by Evans (1991: 101–65) among the occupations regularly pursued by Roman women. Women likely found other options on his list more attractive or lucrative, which would be one explanation for the rarity of female gladiators.

Wiedemann (1992: 109–11) provides several examples of upper-class men who were instructed by gladiators in the use of arms or provided instruction to gladiators. Yet, unlike the woman described by Juvenal, they were not subject to reproach so long as they did not become gladiators. Wiedemann (1992: 36–9) also surveys the Roman authors who, like Pliny, valued gladiatorial games because, despite the

performers' low status, their display of valor supposedly inspired Romans to be courageous.

Zoll (2002), the companion volume to the highly speculative BBC *Gladiator Girl*, has further popularized the notion that the excavators had found the tomb of a female gladiator. The actual publication of the excavations, Mackinder (2000: 28), is much less confident in the identification. Junkelmann (2008: 170–9) illustrates the grave goods from the London burial and some of the documentation for the trauma suffered by the gladiators found in the Ephesos graveyard. At least 68 individuals were found in this graveyard and the forensic analysis was performed by Kanz and Grossschmidt (2005). Only one woman was identified in this group, a female slave whose gravestone was located in this graveyard. Nothing about her remains, such as evidence that she had suffered the type of wounds often sustained when fighting in the arena, suggests that she was a gladiator.

CHAPTER 33

Roman Chariot Racing

Charioteers, Factions, Spectators

Sinclair Bell

1 Introduction

Our story begins sometime in the first century CE¹ at one of the cemeteries on the outskirts of imperial Rome. There a group of mourners gathers around the funeral pyre of a charioteer for the Red team, which, together with the White, Blue, and Green teams, comprise the chariot racing industry at Rome. Shortly before, the Red team's now-deceased charioteer, Felix ("Lucky"), having apparently run out of his namesake luck, met his end in a thunderous crash on the circus racetrack. While not the most famous charioteer of his day, Felix nonetheless inspired deep fanaticism even in death, for just as his funeral pyre reaches its peak temperature, Felix's flesh disintegrating into ash, a distraught fan leaps onto the pyre, immolating himself together with his beloved charioteer. This intense display of devotion so threatens partisans of the other factions that they "spin" the incident as an accident: surely the man had fainted from the heat and incense, they claim, and accidentally *fallen* onto the pyre. The story is of particular interest to us here for two reasons: First, on an anecdotal level, its reporter (Pliny the Elder) claims to have read it in the *acta diurna* or the "daily acts" (*Natural History* 7.168). This suggests that sports news may have been an occasional or even regular feature of Rome's daily gazette (see Baldwin 1979). Second, and more importantly, it points to the intensity of fans' feelings toward the sport of chariot racing, its factions, and its heroes.

The fact that this story – probably the most extreme example of fan

behavior to come down to us from the annals of imperial Rome – originates from the world of the circus will probably strike most readers as surprising. For among the many misperceptions about ancient Roman games that have become widespread, especially as a result of popular film and television, is the belief that gladiatorial combats were *the* premiere spectacle at Rome. For instance, it is often supposed that they attracted the biggest audiences or the most partisan fans. In fact, neither assumption is true. The Circus Maximus was many centuries older and considerably larger than the Colosseum (on such facilities, see Chapter 38 in this volume), and chariot races drew the largest crowds in Rome and throughout the Roman Empire and continued to do so centuries after the gladiatorial games faded away (see Chapter 43). Furthermore, there is no evidence for spectators in arenas behaving as fanatically as those in circuses or even theaters (Fagan 2011: 93 n. 34, 221). The reasons behind this are complex and go beyond the scope of this essay (but see further Chapter 31). Instead, the aim here is to explore circus games' activity and setting, their star performers, their spectators and fans, and the importance of the circus games for Roman society as a whole.

2 The Circus

Roman culture was a performance culture, and the Circus Maximus was its grandest stage. No larger man-made structure existed in the entirety of the Roman Empire, and no other building accommodated an audience on its scale (approximately a hundred and fifty thousand). In its fully developed form, the Circus Maximus became a showpiece for Rome's hallowed traditions, urban splendor, and global ambitions – “a fitting place for a nation that has conquered the world” (Pliny the Younger *Panegyric* 51) – as well as the prototype for dozens of similar edifices around the Mediterranean. And, unlike any other form of spectacle building, the Circus Maximus, as the site of the rape of the Sabines, was intertwined with the legendary foundation of Rome itself. (For further discussion of the quasi-legendary rape of the Sabines, see Chapter 27.)

The Circus Maximus and circuses generally are most accurately thought of as sites of performance because of the different functions they served and the diverse programs that were staged in them. Some circus games (*ludi circenses*) were held annually as celebrations of festivals central to state religion (*ludi publici*), including the *ludi Romani*, *ludi Apollinares*, *ludi Ceriales*, *ludi Megalenses*, and *ludi Florales*. (On *ludi* in general, see Chapter 25.) Other games (*ludi votivi*) were

held in association with major state events, such as military triumphs, temple dedications, emperors' birthdays and funerals, and government jubilees. The games held in the circus included chariot races as well as other types of spectacles such as gladiatorial combats, animal hunts, public executions, mock battles, and paramilitary parades.

Chariot races were both the oldest and most popular of the spectacles. Their origins and development remain subject to debate; Etruscan and Italic influences are rightfully attributed a greater role than Greek in the most recent scholarship. The earliest chariot races at Rome are said to have taken place in the *Vallis Murcia* (the depression between the Palatine and Aventine hills) at Rome's founding, in the context of religious ritual (Cicero *Republic* 2.12). The races were always suffused with ritual and custom, from the opening procession of gilded statues of the gods (*pompa circensis*) to the altars, shrines, and statues of deities installed along the track's central barrier (*euripus*, commonly but less accurately called the *spina*) and the temples located within the circus stands. The religious aura of the circus was experienced in still other ways; poets and polemicists explored the idea of the racetrack as a temple and cosmos (Tertullian *On Spectacles* 8, Cassiodorus *Variae* 3.51), while astrologers and fortune tellers peddled hopes and dreams to passersby keen to alter their fate – or even just the outcome of a race (Cicero *On Divination* 1.132, Horace *Satires* 1.6.111).

The scale and appeal of the games expanded over the course of the Republic (509–31 BCE) and Empire (31 BCE–476 CE) so that they and their venues also evolved into vehicles of imperial ideology and mass entertainment. The games became an arena for political negotiation in which the people petitioned the emperor (e.g., for tax relief, Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 19.24–7); an instrument of socialization through a public dress code and seating hierarchy (e.g., Suetonius *Augustus* 44.2, Calpurnius Siculus *Eclogues* 7); an advertisement for imperial munificence through the provision of jaw-dropping spectacles and state-of-the-art amenities (e.g., *ILS* 286, the dedicatory inscription thanking Trajan for his generosity in expanding the seating in the Circus Maximus); and a megaphone for Rome's military muscle and superpower greatness through both temporary and permanent exhibitions of exotic captive cultures (e.g., displays of wild animals in triumphs, the dedication of an Egyptian obelisk along the *euripus*). Moreover, with the decline of gladiatorial games starting in the fourth century, chariot races gained even more popularity, particularly in the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

The races were preceded by a sacred procession that paraded through the city streets and terminated in the Circus Maximus, where it circled the track (Ovid *Amores* 3.2.43–58). The procession included

images of the gods (the 12 Olympians and many others) that were conveyed to the monumental imperial skybox (*pulvinar*), which served as their shrine and house, from where they presided over the games in the company of the emperor. Following the gods in the procession were magistrates, young nobles, chariot drivers, athletes, dancers, musicians, incense burners, and temple attendants (Dionysius of Halicarnassos *Roman Antiquities* 7.70–3).

Once the parade was finished and the statues of the gods placed in the *pulvinar*, the crowd's attention shifted to the 12 starting gates (*carceres*), where the teams of two- or four-horse chariots sat ready having been assigned their places by lot (see Figure 25.1 for a reconstruction showing the starting gates in the Circus Maximus). The game sponsor (*editor spectaculorum*), ensconced in a loggia above the starting gates, then dropped a white handkerchief (*mappa*) onto the track as a preparatory sign, which was probably followed by a further short brief signal (visual or vocal). The gates were then unlocked (probably simultaneously by a springing mechanism) and the teams exploded forward. The first stage of the race, which extended from the *carceres* to the white break line (*alba linea*) between the lower, conical turning post (*meta secunda*) and the right-hand wall of the stadium seating, allowed chariots to accelerate into position (Cassiodorus *Variae* 3.51). In the second stage the course narrowed, and the chariots raced in parallel lanes from the break line to the line before the judges' tribunal. From this point onward the teams were free to cross lanes. The audience monitored the progress of the race by checking the lap-counting devices (one of seven eggs, the other seven dolphins) installed at either end of the *euripus*. The intrinsic thrill of beholding the race was further enhanced visually by other features, such as the sprinkling of selenite (a transparent form of gypsum) all over the arena floor so that it sparkled in the sun.

During the race the charioteers veered as close as possible to the central barrier to shorten their paths. They also listened to the shouts of advice from their team's auxiliary rider on horseback (*hortator*) and strategized how to gain or guarantee a lead while they avoided the threats of the hairpin turns or too-close competitors (Silius Italicus *Punica* 303–456; Sidonius Apollinaris *To Consentius* 23.320–425). Using lightweight chariots built for speed, the teams raced counterclockwise and circled the *euripus* seven times (approximately 5 kilometers) in about 8–9 minutes total at an average speed of roughly 35 kilometers per hour (though speeds as high as 75 kilometers per hour may have been achieved in the straightaways). This gave attendants only about a minute to clear away any victims and wreckage from accidents, which were routine and occurred especially near the turning posts. The fact that crash scenes appear in the vast

majority of visual representations suggests that such “shipwrecks” (*naufragia*) were not only frequent but also held widespread appeal to the spectators. The race concluded with the sound of a trumpet as the victorious charioteer crossed the finish line, which was located two-thirds of the way down the right side of the track and parallel to the *pulvinar* (on the left) and the judges’ tribunal (on the right). The victor ascended to the judges’ box to claim his prizes (palm branch, wreath, and money) and performed a victory lap in celebration.

Because there were regularly 24 such races on a game day (among other events) and some 66 days of games in a calendar year (as recorded for fourth-century Rome), they required the support of a complex infrastructure. The enormous burden of their cost and organization fell upon the four racing teams (*factiones*) that served as contractors (Cameron 1976). *Factiones* were business entities that are attested from at least the first century BCE (but were surely in place centuries before). The stables (*stabula factionum*) sat about 1–2 kilometers away, in the Campus Martius, from which the animals, performers, and staff traveled to the Circus Maximus. From their earliest mention, the faction managers (*domini*) were private entrepreneurs who were members of a relatively elevated social class (the equestrians). Starting in the late third century, however, each faction was controlled by a senior charioteer (*dominus et agitator factionis*), a shift that was part of a wider trend of awarding veteran entertainers with managerial positions. In addition to charioteers, each faction had a support staff of several hundred coaches, grooms, doctors, and other assistants (see, for example, *CIL* 6.10046 = *ILS* 5313, discussed in Chapter 39). The high level of specialization within the factions produced an internal hierarchy that can be clearly seen among charioteers: a chariot driver who raced a two-horse team (*biga*) was known as an *auriga* (or *bigarius*), while one who achieved a win with a team of four horses (*quadriga*) was known as an *agitator* (or *quadrigarius*) and thus was in the “premiere league.”

The factions were international enterprises: charioteers were drawn from all over the Empire, while racehorses were bred on private and imperial stud farms in Spain, Sicily, Thessaly, North Africa, and Cappadocia (Asia Minor). Unlike the harsh treatment animals endured in other spectacles, racehorses were greatly admired, in some cases becoming major celebrities in the same way as their drivers or other public figures. The poet Martial noted dryly that “Martial is known to the nations and to the people. Why do you envy me? I’m no more famous than Andraemo the horse” (*Epigrams* 10.9.50, trans. D. Shackleton Bailey).

3 Charioteers

Like other public performers discussed in this volume (see Chapter 39), charioteers occupied an unusual place in Roman society, at once famous and infamous. Our primary source of information about their social status is inscriptions on honorific and funerary monuments, which, together with other inscribed objects, provide us with the names of more than two hundred different charioteers (cataloged in Horsmann 1998). While we are uncertain about the legal status of more than half of those individuals, the epigraphic evidence informs us that 66 were *servi* (slaves), 14 were *liberti* (freedmen), 13 were *servi* or *liberti*, and only one was an *ingenuus* (a freeborn citizen). Thus charioteers – like other categories of Roman entertainers such as gladiators and actors – were almost exclusively of low status. Most were slaves (whose participation in the games might eventually win them their freedom), hired freedmen, or foreigners (Greeks especially); they were not, in the main, freeborn Roman citizens in search of fame and fortune.

In fact, freeborn Romans were discouraged from pursuing a career on the track, by both social censure and legislation that was first enacted in the Early Empire. That legislation designated charioteers as *infamis*, or persons lacking in honor, who were barred from holding public office. When elite freeborn citizens performing as charioteers appear in the literary sources, authors hold them up as cautionary tales. A prime example is provided by Nero, who was alleged to have idolized charioteers as well as to have pursued a racing career himself – an ambition that Tacitus labeled a *foedum studium* (“disgraceful desire”) and read as symptomatic of his defective character (*Annals* 14.14.1). Nero’s disgrace was somewhat lessened by his choice of chariot racing, which was considered less shameful than stage performances or gladiatorial fights because equestrianism of all forms, owing to the expense involved, had aristocratic overtones. In addition, the emperor chose to perform in private, thus limiting the degree of public exposure involved in pursuit of his hobby.

Because of their highly public personas but lowly origins and status, charioteers were frequently the subject of bitter invective from (mostly elite) authors. They were criticized for competing publicly for money and for winning astronomical amounts of it (Juvenal *Satires* 7.105–14); for their lionization as public heroes with honorary statues (Galen *De praenotione ad Posthumum (Epigenem)* Kühn 14.604); for their large, fanatical entourages (Pliny *Natural History* 29.10); and for their special access to and corrupting influence on emperors (albeit mostly “bad” ones, such as Caligula and Nero). These authors’ outrage is magnified by many charioteers’ status as mere slaves (Dio

Chrysostom *Orations* 32.75). The criticism of charioteers, who are often lumped in together with other public performers, is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it reflects wider status anxieties as the cultures of Rome's elite and its new popular heroes "interfaced" (see further Toner 1995: 78 and Chapter 41 in this volume). This tension between elite and popular culture is encapsulated in Martial's *Epigrams*, where he decries charioteers as the overpaid posterboys of Rome's lowbrow society (10.74) and yet, elsewhere, bestows undying fame on one of them, the prematurely deceased Flavius Scorpis, as the "darling of the noisy circus, the talk of the town and your short-lived darling, Rome" (10.53, trans. D. Potter).

The paradoxical position of charioteers in Roman society and the hypocrisy inherent in their treatment as both gods *and* monsters was not lost upon all literary observers (e.g., Tertullian *On Spectacles* 22.3–4). However, it is only by turning to charioteers' own monuments that we can reconstruct some measure of their lived reality as historical actors as well as their self-understanding as a group. The recently published funerary inscription of the *auriga* Sextus Vistilius Helenus (*AE* 2001: 268; Thuillier 2004), for example, provides a snapshot of a driver-in-the-making whose career was tragically cut short. This nine-line text informs us that Helenus had recently been transferred from the Green faction, where he was under the tutelage of a coach named Orpheus, to the Blues, where he was coached by Datileus, when he died at age 13. Helenus is referred to as an *auriga* under the care of an apprentice (*doctor*). This inscription confirms that athletes moved between factions like free agents (though some were still slaves and bought) and that the competition for rising stars must have been great. In Helenus's case, the Blues likely had managers or talent scouts who spotted the promise of this *f lorens puer* (blooming lad). In addition, it supports the belief that many charioteers started their training at a very young age; Helenus had presumably been racing for several years already. The recently discovered bronze statuette of a child charioteer of African extraction ([Figure 33.1](#)) – the first image of its kind in Roman art – offers a visual parallel to young Helenus and, even more so, to Crescens, a Mauretanian charioteer who also began his racing career as a boy (*CIL* 6.10050 = *ILS* 5285; see Bell and Döwner forthcoming).

Figure 33.1 Bronze statuette of an African child charioteer (discovered in Altrier), second century CE. *Source:* Musée national d'histoire et d'art Luxembourg, inv. n. 2004–15/1750, © MHNA Luxembourg/T. Lucas.



Finally, Helenus's premature death reminds us of the riskiness of his profession and the reputations that racers as a result developed as both good-luck bringers and sorcerers. Roman charioteers tied reins around their waists, increasing not only their maneuverability but also their risk of dragging, injury, and death in the event of a crash. While the causes of charioteers' deaths are not always explicitly stated, the dangers of the racetrack are clearly suggested by graphic literary similes (e.g., Cicero *Republic* 2.68), medical remedies prescribed for race-related injuries (Pliny *Natural History* 28.237), and funerary inscriptions for young drivers whose lives ended suddenly (e.g., *CIL* 6.10049 = *ILS* 52862). The sheer luck (and not just skill) they required in navigating their chariots at breakneck speed, especially

around the treacherous turns of the *metae*, gave them a reputation as inherently charmed individuals. Romans thought that they could counteract charioteers' good fortune with curse tablets or harness it by wearing their images on finger rings or amulets, some of which were inscribed with commands that echoed the emphatic chants of the crowd (e.g., "Go X!" "Hail X!" "Win!"). At the same time, the inherent riskiness of their profession, combined with their slave (or former slave) status and reputation for hooliganism, associated charioteers in legal codes and the popular imagination with the dark arts.

For charioteers who survived and succeeded, even for a relatively short time, a racing career could bring fame and wealth on a scale unthinkable to most Romans. In this context the inscriptions belonging to the premiere class of charioteers or *miliarii* (i.e., winners of a thousand victories or more) deserve special attention: P. Aelius Gutta Calpurnianus (*CIL* 6.10047 = *ILS* 5285), C. Appuleius Diocles, Flavius Scorus, and Pompeius Musclosus (the latter three in *CIL* 6.10048 = *ILS* 5287). These texts provide us with a full digest of their abilities and achievements, including the honoree's faction, the number of races and victories, the value of the prizes, the categories of the races (e.g., the prestigious race directly after the opening procession), the names of the horses, the number of horses (races with a *quadriga* are standard), and much more. The meticulous catalogs and self-conscious references to rivals' records reflect a sense of professional pride that finds parallels in the funerary monuments of gladiators. Not unlike baseball players today, career statistics formed a central part of their identities, and these seemingly dry facts and figures seeped into the Roman popular consciousness as conversations about their technical abilities and tactical choices. In addition, some drivers achieved wealth on a staggering scale. Diocles amassed a fortune of more than 35 million sesterces over the course of his 24-year career, making him richer than most senators. By contemporary standards he was the Tiger Woods of his day, perhaps even "the best paid athlete of all time" (Struck 2010).

Certain charioteers' wealth and social status were further enhanced by emperors who fraternized with them and rewarded them with gifts (Suetonius *Caligula* 55.2–3) or even appointed them to political office (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae Elagabalus* 6, 12). This celebrity extended far beyond the circuses and imperial palaces at the capital alone and evolved into an international "star cult." While never fully socially accepted on account of their public professions and lowly origins, charioteers' financial success and celebrity reflected the unusual opportunities afforded by Rome's spectacle-driven society.

4 Spectators and Fans

As discussed elsewhere in this volume (see Chapter 29 on material evidence), the direct experiences of everyday Roman spectators are difficult to recover. They do not feature prominently in the extant literary sources, the elite authors of which drew a sharp contrast between their own high-minded disinterest in the chariot races and the vulgar masses (*plebs urbanum*) such games attracted. (It is noteworthy, however, that many of these accounts betray a strikingly intimate knowledge of the very events their authors claim to shun and detest.) Pliny the Younger's well-known letter is representative of this genre, where he concludes, "When I think how this futile, tedious, monotonous business can keep them sitting endlessly in their seats, I take pleasure in the fact that their pleasure is not mine" (*Letters* 9.6, trans. B. Radice).

Like many authors, Pliny frames his critique in terms of social status, which places it within a long-standing tradition of social criticism of the games (see further Chapters 27 and 41). Rather than devoting their leisure time (*otium*) to pursuing the same learned (i.e., literary and philosophical) pursuits that Pliny and his peers do, spectators indulge their "childish passion" in the circus. Worse still, they allow themselves to become emotional and violent, and generally lose all self-control, even though seemingly nothing is at stake. Despite their inherent biases, some of these critiques hit on a central truth: that from the perspective of the invested spectator, *everything* was at stake. Ammianus Marcellinus, writing three centuries after Pliny about "the idle and slothful commons," notes, "Their temple, their dwelling, their assembly, and the height of all their hopes is the Circus Maximus" (28.4.29, trans. J. Rolfe).

The fact that the real target of Pliny's letter was "respectable men" who forgot their proper social station in attending the races points to a larger reality: the passion for chariot racing touched Romans of *every* age, sex, and social class. The so-called *furor circensis* is said to have developed early, as if etched into Romans' very DNA: "Again, there are the peculiar and characteristic vices of this metropolis of ours, taken on, it seems to me, almost in the mother's womb – the passion for play actors, and the mania for gladiatorial shows and horse-racing" (Tacitus *Dialogues* 29.3–4, trans. W. Peterson). Children are recorded not only as passionate about the sport but also as partisans of particular charioteers, horses, and factions, such as young Nero's support for the Greens (Suetonius *Nero* 22.1). Nor were such passions limited to boys; archaeological evidence from girls' tombs (e.g., game tokens, inscriptions) suggests their shared interest as well. More than any other venue for spectacles, the circus was a microcosm of Roman

society that embraced young and old, male and female, rich and poor, slave and free, native and foreign, even members of the intelligentsia such as the historian Tacitus, who had a learned exchange with a Roman knight in the circus stands (Pliny the Younger *Letters* 9.23).

What was the appeal? A day at the circus could be hot, noisy, and dirty, but it held many attractions besides the thrill of the races themselves and their accompanying spectacles. The lack of a *velarium* (fabric canopy), in contrast to the Colosseum, meant that spectators were exposed to the sun's blinding glare and sweltering heat, especially uncomfortable for those observing its code of dress (a toga without a coat). While the glare of the sun made it difficult to see, the roar of the crowd made it difficult to hear, both problems that the signaling system of trumpets and lap counters somewhat alleviated. Seats at the circus, which are described as narrow, hard, and dirty, could add to the discomfort. However, because "the law of the place" allowed men and women to sit beside one another, the circus held out the promise of a chance romantic encounter that sexually segregated seating at the theater and amphitheater forbade (Ovid *Art of Love* 1.135–70). Ovid counsels his readers to exploit their cramped quarters to pick up attractive female spectators: "Nor let the contest of noble steeds escape you; the spacious Circus holds many opportunities" (1.135–6, trans. J. Mozley; cf. *Amores* 3.2 and Henderson 2002).

Opportunity and chance also lay behind the other major attractions of the races: prizes, betting, and curses. Nero and Hadrian, among others, staged imperial "giveaways" in which tiny inscribed balls were thrown into the stands and the audience members who caught them could claim prizes such as food, clothing, and animals (Dio Cassius 62.18.2, 69.8.2). Placing wagers was rife (Tertullian *On Spectacles* 16.1; Martial *Epigrams* 11.1.15), and the outcome of such risk taking, whether positive or negative, could be swift and emotional. Epictetus (1.9.27) discusses a commoner who fainted in the stands after the horse he bet on won a come-from-behind victory, while Juvenal (*Satires* 11.194–6) censures a praetor for losing his fortune betting on the very games he organized. Juvenal captures all of these elements of the experience – the heat, the noise, the betting, and the crowd's topsy-turvy state – when he grouches about the circus *clamor* that interrupts his dinner party:

A roar strikes upon my ear which tells me that the Green has won; for had it lost, Rome would be as sad and dismayed as when the consuls were vanquished in the dust of Cannae. Such sights are for the young, whom it befits to shout and make bold wagers with a smart damsel by their side; but let my shrivelled skin drink in the vernal sun, and escape the toga. (*Satires* 11.197–204, trans.

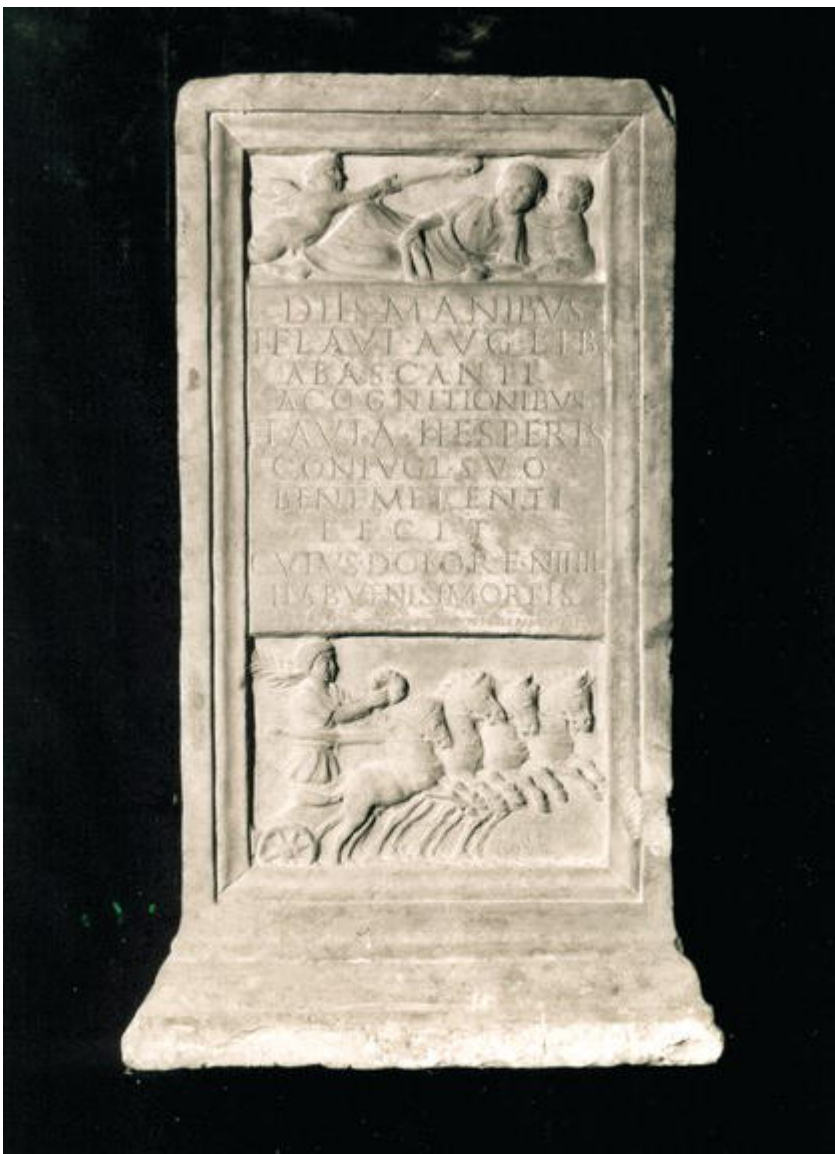
Emotions ran especially high for fans, who might even attempt to influence the outcome of the races by employing lead curse tablets (*defixiones*), which they activated through burial at the starting gates or on the racetrack. (Most of the relevant *defixiones* are from North Africa; on curse tablets, see Chapter 40.) These tablets were inscribed by magicians with visceral images and violent, detailed curses that summon demons to maim or kill competitors and/or their horses. They attest not only to the financial but also the psychological investment that many fans made in their human and equine heroes. Indeed, such was the level of the crowd's passion that it sometimes boiled over into violence, as seen in rioting at chariot races in Alexandria (c.71–c.75 CE) (Philostratus *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.15, 5.26).

Even though authors sought to portray the passions in the stands as the “common madness” of Rome's social underbelly, the *furor circensis* reached far beyond the arena's walls and penetrated deep into the lifeways of *all* Romans. The architectural form of the circus was transplanted to elite countryside villas where it was reimagined as hippodrome-shaped gardens (McEwen 1995). The vocabulary of the circus insinuated itself across literary genres, from epic and bucolic poetry (e.g., Vergil *Aeneid* 2.476–7 and *Georgics* 1.272–3) to medical texts (e.g., Galen *On the Causes of Respiration* Kühn 6.469). The dexterity of the charioteers and the speed of the horses were – true to Martial's words – “the talk of the town,” dissected by riffraff on street corners (Ammianus Marcellinus 28.4.28), replayed by children in classrooms (Suetonius *Nero* 22.1), and chewed over by guests at dinner tables (Petronius *Satyricon* 70.13). The costumes of at least one faction spawned imitation clothing for children, whose parents outfitted them with “little green jackets” (Juvenal *Satires* 5.143–4). And the races and their heroes inspired a broad menu of visual and material culture that catered to every income and style. Lowborn charioteers and bloody racing accidents were tastefully commodified as ivory figurines and domestic wall paintings, while aerial views of the Circus Maximus – “one of the most beautiful and most admirable structures in Rome” (Dionysius of Halicarnassos *Roman Antiquities* 3.68) – lent an air of borrowed grandeur to workaday clay lamps.

Charioteers' allure – their popularity, winning records, and reputed magical powers – even influenced how certain Romans chose to be remembered in death (cf. Chapter 28, noting Figure 28.3). The grave altar of Titus Flavius Abascantus (Figure 33.2) commemorates an imperial freedman who worked as clerk of the courts in the late first century. The relief panel that decorates its base features a charioteer racing his *quadriga*, with an inscription overhead that identifies the

figures as (Flavius) Scorpus and his four racehorses Ingenuus, Admetus, Passerinus, and Atmetus. We do not know what motivated the choice of this imagery. However, since Romans invoked charioteers' good fortune and magical abilities in a wide range of media, Abascantus (or his wife, who commissioned the tomb) may have seen Scorpus's image as possessing a talismanic quality. The extreme example of a fan appealing to his favorite charioteer for salvation and immortality is provided by Pliny's account of Felix's funeral, where "by at last 'realizing' the many earlier potential deaths shared vicariously with his idol, the dead man had brought what the games represented directly into life" (Plass 1995: 40–1). For some Romans confronting death, the circus truly was "the height of all their hopes."

Figure 33.2 Marble funerary altar of T. Flavius Abascantus, 95 or 98CE. *Source:* Palazzo Ducale (Museo Lapidario), Urbino, inv. no. 41117, © Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici delle Marche.



5 Conclusion

When taken as a collective, the literary sources and the visual and material culture demonstrate that the circus games were much more than public, ceremonial occasions; they were events that could play a significant role in the way that Romans at all levels of society structured their private experiences, both inside and outside the circus. To be sure, a chief attraction of attending the games was their edge-of-your-seat, high-speed spectacle: the opportunity to witness a

favorite faction, charioteer, or horse prevail while risking life and limb and, at the same time, to watch rivals suffer spectacular crashes in defeat. Nor can we discount the power and appeal of the other kinds of events staged there, from the wild animal displays that transformed spectators into vicarious tourists of Rome's far-flung empire (see Chapter 34) to the religious processions that encouraged the communal reenactment of the city's deep past. And yet for many spectators, race days might also entail thrilling moments of personal revelation – of winning a prize or a bet, of discovering a lover in the stands, of seeing a curse fulfilled, of finding salvation in a hero or losing all hope witnessing his death. Romans came to the circus not only to live in the hypercharged present, to see and be seen within the collective hive, but also to imagine an escape from their own mundane lives, perhaps even to alter their fates. The potential for such moments of revelation, set against the backdrop of high drama, undoubtedly explains why, hundreds of years after he wrote them, Juvenal's words still rang true: "All Rome today is in the Circus" (*Satires* 11.197).

ABBREVIATIONS

AE = *Année Epigraphique*

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

ILS = *Inscriptionum Latinarum Selectae*

NOTES

¹ All dates are CE unless otherwise indicated.

² *CIL* 6.10049 = *ILS* 5286 was carved on a funerary monument erected in memory of two brothers, ages 20 and 29, by their father, Polyneices, who was himself a charioteer.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For overviews of chariot racing, see Beacham 1999; Junkelmann 2000; Kyle 2007; Meijer 2010; Toner 1995; and Chapter 38 in the present volume. Humphrey 1986 remains the authoritative study of the archaeological context of Roman circuses. See also the historical sources collected by Futrell 2006 and the various contributions to Bergmann and Kondoleon 1999 and Nelis-Clément and Roddaz 2008.

On racing practices and racehorses, see Hyland 1990: 201–30 and Bell and Willekes forthcoming. On circus factions, see Thuillier 2012 (Republican and Imperial periods) and Cameron 1976 (Late Antiquity). On religion and the circus, see Green 2009 and Marcattili 2009 (Republican and Early Imperial periods) and Curran 2000 (Late Antiquity). On politics and the circus, see Cameron 1976 and Weeber 1994.

On the social and legal status of charioteers, see Horsmann 1998; Potter 2010; and Leppin 2011 (Republican and Imperial periods) and Cameron 1973 (Late Antiquity). On charioteers as good-luck bringers, see Sande 1999; as sorcerers, see Lee-Stecum 2006. On curse tablets, see Gager 1990 and 1992; Heintz 1998; and Zaleski’s essay on religion in the present volume, Chapter 40.

Circus spectators are the subject of Lim 1999 and Henderson 2002. Fans are not well studied, though see Lee 1983 and Meijer 2010. Plass 1995; Fagan 2011; and Chapter 31 in this volume analyze the social psychology of the crowd at gladiatorial arenas but offer useful comparisons to circus audiences as well. See Garland 2006 on the power of fame and celebrity in Rome, including public performers.

CHAPTER 34

Roman Beast Hunts

Chris Epplett

1 Introduction

While gladiatorial combats and chariot races are perhaps the spectacles most commonly associated with ancient Rome in modern perception, a third type of spectacle, the *venatio* (beast hunt), was also popular among Romans. Animal spectacles of one kind or another, in fact, were staged over a longer period of time in Roman territory than gladiatorial contests.

A variety of sources attest to the popularity of such events in the Roman world. Writers such as Pliny the Elder and Suetonius often mention especially noteworthy spectacles staged in Rome, including *venationes*. Inscriptions commemorating games staged by wealthy residents of dozens of different communities demonstrate the ubiquity of animal spectacles over the centuries of Roman rule. Artistic evidence, in particular mosaics from North Africa, leave no doubt that *venationes* were memorable occasions.

Staged animal hunts, typically with aristocrats and monarchs as active participants, were a staple of many societies in Asia and Europe for millennia (Allsen 2006; Kyle 2007: 23–37), so it is not surprising that such events also attracted a wide following in ancient Rome. What is relatively rare in terms of the hunts in Rome is that they did not normally include the direct participation of either rulers or the aristocratic elite. Nonetheless, Roman animal spectacles served many of the same ideological and propagandistic functions as those found elsewhere.

2 Origins and Development of the Beast Hunts in Republican Rome

When Romans began staging animal spectacles in the third century BCE, they were aware of and influenced by the practices of other cultures in the Mediterranean, most notably the Greeks. Spectacles involving trained animals (e.g., bears, lions) took place periodically in Greek city-states such as Athens; the earliest relevant evidence dates to the fourth century (see, for example, Isocrates *Antidosis* 213), but such shows probably had a long history in the Greek world before that time. Contact between Rome and the Greek East intensified over time, and Greek animal showmen could have brought their talents to new audiences in Italy and thereby helped acclimatize the latter to animal displays (Loisel 1912: 90–1).

Another, probably more important, influence was the magnificent procession of exotic animals staged by Ptolemy II on the streets of Alexandria in 275/4 BCE, an event which attracted widespread attention far beyond the borders of Egypt. The hundreds of animals involved in this event, intended in part to embody and symbolize the wealth and extent of the Ptolemaic Kingdom, included Indian elephants, lions, leopards, cheetahs, a rhinoceros, and a giraffe (Jennison 1937: 30–5; Rice 1983; Coleman 1996; Bell 2004: 114–38).

The earliest known Roman animal spectacles took place in 275 and 250 BCE, when captured war elephants were paraded through the streets of Rome by the victorious generals Dentatus and Metellus, respectively. The first animal spectacles in Rome, like their Greek counterparts, thus appear to have focused more upon exhibition than slaughter. The spectacles of 275 and 250 could have been inspired in part by reports of Ptolemy II's procession in Alexandria. Nonetheless, these displays also conformed, in certain respects, to the traditional Roman celebration of military triumph in that animal as well as human prisoners of war were paraded before the Roman populace (Kyle 2007: 259–64; Shelton 2004: 363–5).

By the late third century BCE, exhibitions of exotic animals were staged in Rome on a fairly regular basis and no longer merely consisted of animals captured as spoils of war. The playwright Plautus (c.254–184 BCE) refers to contemporary processions of African animals and displays of ostriches in the Circus Maximus as if they were relatively common occurrences (*The Persian* 197–8; *The Little Carthaginian* 1011–12).

The expansion of Roman territory and influence in the last three centuries of the Republic allowed *editores* (individuals who organized games) greater and more regular access to exotic animals. Scipio Nasica, for example, probably exploited his family's close connection with the ruling dynasty of Numidia in North Africa to procure animals for the spectacle that he, along with Lentulus, staged in 169 BCE (Deniaux 2000: 1300).

Aristocrats like Nasica also appear to have used such channels of influence to stock their own private animal enclosures, or *vivaria*, with exotic beasts. The large *vivaria* characteristic of the Late Republic had a precedent in the modest enclosures for hares (*leporaria*) common in Italy from a much earlier date. Another source of inspiration was the magnificent animal enclosures that the Romans encountered as they started conquering territories in the eastern Mediterranean in the second century BCE (Epplett 2003). Contemporary *vivaria* and public animal spectacles appear to have been mutually reinforcing. The private animal exhibitions staged at various *vivaria* apparently drew their inspiration, on occasion, from contemporary spectacles, and, conversely, members of the Roman political elite who possessed their own enclosures may have been inspired to replicate their own animal collections for the pleasure of the general public at various events they staged to increase their political popularity.¹

The practice of collecting and displaying exotic animals in Rome, as we have seen, seems partially to owe its existence to Greek or Ptolemaic precedents, but the most characteristic type of Roman animal spectacle, the *venatio*, appears to have arisen through influences closer to home. The famous scene from the sixth-century BCE Tomb of the Augurs in Tarquinia, which depicts a hooded man fighting some sort of animal (most likely a dog), suggests that some form of staged animal combat may have existed in earlier Etruscan culture (Futrell 1997: 15–16; see Chapter 26 in this volume). Carthaginian customs may also have influenced Roman practice (Ville 1981: 52–4). The most decisive influence upon the development of Roman *venationes*, however, appears to have been gladiatorial combat.

The first securely attested beast hunt in Rome (as opposed to a nonviolent display or procession of animals) was a *venatio* staged by Marcus Fulvus Nobilior in 186 BCE that featured both lions and leopards (Livy 39.22.2). The term *venatio*, in the context of a public spectacle, most commonly denotes either animals fighting against each other, or trained human performers (*venatores*) confronting various beasts in the arena.² Therefore, when a given animal spectacle, such as that of Nobilior, is simply described as a *venatio*, we cannot be sure of what specific events were included.

Nobilior's *venatio* took place during a period when gladiatorial

spectacles were being staged on a rapidly escalating scale and it may well have been at least partly a result of that escalation. Public animal displays, from their earliest appearance in Rome, were commonly staged by magistrates in association with other types of events such as chariot racing and gladiatorial combat. It seems likely, then, that developments in one type of spectacle affected other types of contemporary events. The most important change in this context made itself felt in the early second century BCE, when games started to involve an ever increasing number of gladiators. This intensification was perhaps related to Rome's disastrous losses in the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE) (Kyle 1998: 47–8; Wiedemann 1992: 5–6). *Editores* seeking political popularity staged ever-grander spectacles, and nonviolent animal displays perhaps seemed lackluster in comparison to their gladiatorial counterparts, inspiring spectacle organizers to introduce a similar element of violence into animal shows to maintain their popularity.

During the final two centuries of the Republic, violent animal spectacles, like gladiatorial shows, became increasingly elaborate and popular. The growing popularity of the *venationes*, and their potential political usefulness, led to a short-lived senatorial ban on the importation of African animals, which was in force between 186 (the year of Nobilior's spectacle) and 170 BCE (Pliny *Natural History* 8.24). Even at this relatively early date, some members of the Senate were evidently concerned that an ambitious magistrate like Nobilior might use the popularity gained through the staging of a successful *venatio* to elevate himself above his peers. Therefore they sought to make the procurement of exotic animals more difficult. It is notable, in terms of the public demand for animal spectacles, that the tribune Gaius Aufudius, who overturned the ban in 170, was a representative of the plebs and hence spoke for the people, not the aristocracy.

Nonviolent displays of exotic animals did not disappear entirely after the emergence of *venationes* in the early second century BCE, but the hunts swiftly became the most popular animal spectacle in Rome. By the end of the century, in fact, the Roman public had come to expect that mid-level magistrates, the aediles, would stage a beast hunt each year as part of their civic duties. (Politically ambitious Romans typically held a succession of offices, serving as quaestor, then aedile, then praetor, before seeking election to the consulship, the most important political position in the Republic.) Sulla claimed to have lost his initial bid for the praetorship because of the public's wish that he first serve a term as aedile and thereby have to provide a magnificent *venatio* for them (Plutarch *Sulla* 5).

Magistrates staging beast spectacles in the last two centuries of the Republic regularly tried to maintain spectator interest by increasing

the number and variety of the beasts involved as well as by making novel, and often more violent, additions to the entertainment. Much of the innovation in *venationes* in the Late Republic involved staging fights between animals that had previously only appeared in nonviolent displays or of presenting combats between unusual combinations of animals. In 104 BCE, for example, the aediles Crassus and Scaevola staged the first combat of multiple lions in Rome, and the first hunt involving elephants was presented only a few years later in 99 BCE (Pliny *Natural History* 8.70, 8.20). The first combat between elephants and bulls was also staged in the early first century BCE, although the exact date is not certain.³ The growing scale and variety of such events clearly provided a precedent for the truly lavish animal spectacles of the last years of the Republic.

Venationes involving over a hundred beasts (such as Scaurus's spectacle of 58 BCE featuring 150 leopards, 5 crocodiles, and a hippopotamus (Pliny *Natural History* 8.24)) were not unusual by the first century BCE, but such spectacles were eclipsed by the extravagant events staged by Pompey and Caesar. In 55 BCE, Pompey, drawing upon his extensive overseas contacts, staged a lavish spectacle in Rome featuring approximately 20 elephants, 410 leopards, 500 lions, and various other animals. Unfortunately for Pompey, this event was not memorable for any of the reasons he might have envisaged. The spectacle's most famous incident occurred when many spectators became outraged at the slaughter of seemingly defenseless elephants by North African hunters whom Pompey had specially imported for the event (Cicero *Letters to His Friends* 7.1.3; Dio Cassius 39.38.2–3; Pliny *Natural History* 8.20–1; Seneca *On the Shortness of Life* 13.6–7; Plutarch *Pompey* 52.4). Apparently spectators were upset because the elephants appeared to beg for mercy in a most humanlike fashion before being dispatched by the hunters. This particular *venatio*, then, was not the public relations triumph Pompey had undoubtedly expected (Shelton 1999; Bell 2004: 157–72; Fagan 2011: 249–52).

In 46 BCE Caesar attempted to outdo Pompey with magnificent games featuring 400 lions, Thessalian bulls, and the first appearance of a giraffe in Rome. He also avoided the wholesale slaughter of elephants that made Pompey's spectacle infamous (Pliny *Natural History* 8.20, 8.70; Dio Cassius 43.22–3; Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 37.2). Caesar's program included a combat featuring cavalry, infantry, and at least 40 elephants, but the elephants apparently had more of a sporting chance for survival than those killed in Pompey's spectacle. No surviving evidence indicates spectator displeasure at Caesar's event.⁴

The extravagant animal spectacles of Pompey and Caesar served as a model for subsequent Roman emperors, demonstrating the scale of

events possible when an *editor* mobilized contacts and resources from throughout Roman territory. More particularly, Pompey and Caesar were among the earliest spectacle organizers in Rome to advertise deliberately the extent of their conquests (real or alleged) to the Roman populace through the choice of animals appearing in their shows. In his games of 55 BCE, for example, Pompey exhibited the first Ethiopian apes and the first rhinoceros ever seen in Rome in order to highlight the widespread influence he had gained in Africa and the East through his successful military campaigns. Similarly, Caesar presented a giraffe and Thessalian bulls symbolizing his victory in Egypt and his defeat of Pompey at the Battle of Pharsalos in 48 BCE (Merten 1991: 140–2; Shelton 1999: 245–6, 249–50).

3 Animal Spectacles under the Empire

Augustus and subsequent emperors staged animal spectacles in Rome more frequently than in the past, and they brought them under tighter imperial control, a measure both of the shows' popularity and their propaganda value. By the end of Augustus's reign (31 BCE–14 CE), animal events were firmly linked to gladiatorial contests: a typical day's entertainment at the arena henceforth consisted of *venationes* or other animal events in the morning, criminal executions during the midday pause, and gladiatorial combats in the afternoon. Under the developed system, 10 days at the end of December each year were reserved for the staging of such games, although the total number of shows annually was undoubtedly higher as a result of spectacles being presented intermittently throughout a given year to celebrate special occasions. Beginning in 20 BCE, for example, such events were staged each year to celebrate the emperor's birthday (Wiedemann 1992: 11–12, 55, 59; Ville 1981: 123–7).

In the Late Republic, apart from the exceptional spectacles of victorious Roman commanders like Caesar or Pompey, *venationes* and other animal events had been routinely staged by aediles or praetors (Ville 1981: 94–5, 97–9). By the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE) however, no games (including animal spectacles) could be staged in Rome except by the emperor or one of his officials (Wiedemann 1992: 8). After this date magistrates or even private citizens could periodically stage animal events in Rome but only after obtaining imperial permission. On such occasions spectators still understood who was ultimately responsible for their entertainment.

Under the emperors violent and nonviolent animal spectacles alike served a wider variety of propaganda functions than they had under the Republic. Of course, Roman emperors, like victorious generals of the Republic, still used animal *spectacula* to advertise recent military conquests or the (alleged) expansion of Roman political influence. Augustus, for example, exhibited a hippopotamus in Rome to commemorate his conquest of Egypt, and a tiger brought to Rome during his reign symbolized contemporary Roman interest in the Indian subcontinent (Ville 1981: 110–11; Merten 1991: 141–2).

Another, more general, propaganda purpose of the animal spectacles was to symbolize the emperor's control over the natural world, a role similar to that played by the institution of the royal hunt in many other cultures. The sheer number and variety of animals brought to Rome for various events, in particular large and/or dangerous beasts, served as proof of the emperor's power to bend the natural world to his will (Allsen 2006: 23; Fagan 2011: 18). Emperors also demonstrated their mastery over animals by forcing them to fight and die in the arena and by having beasts perform fantastic tricks or maneuvers including, for example, terrestrial animals fighting in water, as occurred during the inaugural games of the Colosseum in 80 CE (Dio Cassius 66.25.2; Coleman 1993: 65).

Although nonviolent animal displays were not unheard of in imperial spectacles, especially in the Late Empire, *venationes* were by far the most popular form of animal event under the Empire. Roman territory grew during the first century or so of the Empire, thereby giving spectacle organizers access to a greater number and variety of wild animals. Consequently, the scale of *venationes* and other animal events also increased. Unfortunately, we cannot rely without question upon the figures given by various ancient sources for the number of animals at a given event; in many cases the numbers appear to be prone to exaggeration (cf. Dio Cassius 43.22.4). Nonetheless, taking such figures as a rough estimate of the total number of animals involved in a given spectacle gives an idea of the size of the *venationes* and other such events over time.

Augustus claimed that 3,500 animals were killed in 26 *venationes* during his reign, which suggests an average of 135 beasts slain per show (*Res Gestae* 22). Subsequent rulers reportedly staged even bloodier animal spectacles. Nero, for example, staged a single *venatio* in which allegedly 300 lions and 400 bears died (Dio Cassius 61.9.1). Such figures pale, however, beside the number of animals Titus is said to have collected for the *venationes* included in the lavish inaugural games for the Colosseum in 80 CE. In over a hundred days of festivities, nine thousand animals are said to have perished (Dio Cassius 66.25.1).

The largest series of *venationes* on record was staged in the first half of the second century CE, a period when Rome reached its maximum territorial extent and the height of its prosperity. According to Dio Cassius (68.15), the 123 days of spectacles staged by Trajan to celebrate his final victory over the Dacians saw the death of some eleven thousand animals, a figure allegedly equaled by the 120 days of games the emperor subsequently funded for his heir Hadrian (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae Hadrian* 3.8; Wiedemann 1992: 11). An inscription from Ostia (the *fasti Ostienses*) records more precisely that 2,689 beasts died in another set of games staged in Rome early in Hadrian's reign (*CIL* 14.4546; Fora 1996: 42–3).

Undoubtedly, the most famous devotee of the *venationes* was the emperor Commodus (ruled 180–92 CE), who not only staged such events for his subjects, but also participated in them (albeit without putting himself in any real danger) to emulate the hunting prowess of his role model, Hercules. Such was Commodus's passion for hunting and killing animals that he is credited with using special crescent-tipped arrows to more easily decapitate ostriches in the arena (Herodian 1.15.5–6). Most Roman authors saw Commodus's direct participation in such staged hunts as improper behavior, but it would not have seemed so in many other cultures. Interestingly, at least in Herodian's account (1.15.7), Commodus's subjects indeed found something edifying in his displays of hunting prowess; it was the emperor's decision to comport himself as a gladiator which they found truly degrading (Hekster 2002: 154–62).

Commodus's successors, apart from Caracalla, did not emulate his direct participation in *venationes* but simply staged such events for their subjects. Unfortunately, one of our major sources for imperial spectacles following the reign of Commodus is the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (*SHA*), a work whose content cannot always be taken at face value (Cameron 2011: 743–82). Nonetheless, the *SHA* and surviving evidence pertaining to later Roman animal spectacles clearly indicates that the number of exotic animals available for imperial *venationes* declined steadily over time. This development is perhaps best illustrated by the collection of animals said to have belonged to Gordian III in the mid-third century: “There were 32 elephants at Rome in the time of Gordian . . . 10 elk, 10 tigers, 60 tame lions, 30 tame leopards, 10 *belbi* or hyenas . . . six hippopotami, one rhinoceros, 10 wild lions, 10 giraffes, 20 wild asses, 40 wild horses, and various other animals of this nature without number” (*SHA The Three Gordians* 33.1, trans. D. Magie). The biographer claims that Gordian had a huge collection of animals (*animalia innumera*), but the numbers recorded for specific types of animals do not bear out this claim. For example, 32 elephants, six hippopotami, and a single rhinoceros do not

represent an especially large collection of exotic animals compared to the numbers involved in various spectacles in the first and second centuries. One explanation for this decline in the availability of exotic animals is obvious: as the Roman Empire descended into crisis in the third century, rulers no longer possessed the necessary funds or infrastructure to procure as many animals as their predecessors, which profoundly affected the nature of later Roman animal spectacles.

Such problems were not limited to Rome itself. Magistrates and private citizens in cities and towns throughout the Empire staged *venationes* and gladiatorial events to improve their standing within the community (see Chapter 30). Responding to public demand, priests of the imperial cult in various places routinely staged such shows as part of their official duties. These local spectacles, because of the limited resources available, were decidedly more modest than the shows at Rome, but occasionally a given *editor* could stage an unusually large event owing to imperial largesse. A *duumvir* of Minturnae,⁵ for example, boasted of the alleged *editio celebrata* he staged in 249 thanks to the *indulgentia principis* (permission of the emperor) (*CIL* 10.6012; Fora 1996: 71–3).

Venationes were particularly popular in North Africa, in part because spectacle organizers there had much easier access to wild animals like leopards or lions. Also, in an area of intensive agricultural cultivation like North Africa, the removal of such dangerous beasts from arable land was seen as a public service (Bomgardner 1992: 162–3; cf. Fagan 2011: 132). With the popularity of such events in North Africa, numerous hunting corporations emerged, like the *Telegenii*, who were paid by spectacle organizers to produce various *venationes* in their name. Evidence for these corporations and their activities in North Africa suggests that each of these groups possessed their own devout followers, not unlike the partisans of the circus factions, yet another indication of the popularity of *venationes* in the region (Beschaouch 1996 and 2006: 1405–11; Dunbabin 1978: 67–78).

4 The Infrastructure of Roman Animal Spectacles

The staging of animal spectacles outside of North Africa required the efforts of myriad officials and personnel behind the scenes to ensure that the requisite animals were captured and transported safely to their ultimate destinations and that the events within the arena proceeded as planned. As with other organizational aspects of the

venationes, the infrastructure of such spectacles, especially those organized by the emperors themselves, became more regularized over time.

The available evidence suggests that the production of animal spectacles in the Republic, in particular the procurement of the necessary beasts, was largely informal. Spectacle organizers like Pompey or Caesar used their overseas contacts to acquire animals and hunters for their events. Magistrates organizing animal shows also called upon their political associates in wildlife-rich areas of Roman territory to supply the animals they needed. A famous example of this is seen in the series of letters Marcus Caelius Rufus, a candidate for aedile, wrote to Cicero in search of leopards when Cicero was governor of Cilicia in 51 BCE (Cicero *Letters to His Friends* 2.11.2, 8.2.2, 8.4.5, 8.6.5, 8.8.10, 8.9.3; *Letters to Atticus* 6.1.21).

This practice of using one's political contacts to round up animals for a spectacle appears to have lasted almost as long as the *venationes* themselves. Libanius, for example, attempted to use his political influence on more than one occasion in the mid-fourth century CE to procure animals for spectacles being organized by his friends and relatives in Antioch (Libanius *Letters* 217, 544, 586–8, 598–9, 1118, 1131, 1399, 1400). Similarly, Symmachus, some fifty years later, exploited his political connections to try and obtain various beasts for *venationes* being staged by his son in Rome (Symmachus *Letters* 2.46, 2.76–7, 4.63, 5.59, 5.62, 6.35, 7.122, 9.117, 9.144).

Unfortunately, such correspondence only provides the barest mention of the numerous civilian hunters and other support personnel enlisted to capture and transport animals. The letters of Cicero and Libanius, for example, mention men named Patiscus and Polycarp, who evidently made a living by obtaining animals for wealthy clients, but they say next to nothing about the hunters and trappers employed in turn by these entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, as other evidence suggests, local huntsmen, particularly in wildlife-rich areas of the Empire, certainly made a career of supplying animals to the countless shows staged throughout Roman territory over the course of centuries. Epigraphic evidence dating to the early third century CE from Noricum (modern-day Austria), for example, mentions the involvement of a prominent local family, the Albii, in the animal trade (Egger 1966).

As the animal spectacles and their infrastructure became more regularized under Augustus and subsequent emperors, one of the most important developments was the increasing role of the Roman military in the capture and transport of animals (Epplott 2001). Perhaps the best evidence for this particular activity is an inscription from Moesia Inferior (modern-day Bulgaria) recording the various detachments of

troops ordered by the governor in 147 CE to capture bulls and European bison for an upcoming *venatio*, probably that staged by Antoninus Pius in Rome the following year (Velkov and Alexandrov 1988). Other inscriptions mention specialist military troops whose noncombat duties evidently involved the hunting and capture of game. For example, *venatores immunes*, who received exemption from more mundane military duties in exchange for their hunting skills, are attested within Roman frontier garrisons and also within the elite Praetorian Guard (*CIL* 3.7449, 6.130). Military inscriptions also record specialist *ursarii* (bear hunters) and *vestigatores* (trackers) (e.g., *CIL* 13.8639, 13.12048; Kiessling 1960: no. 9272). Of course, such personnel could often have hunted and trapped food for fellow soldiers, but given the military's role in supplying animals for spectacles, their duties at least periodically must have involved the latter as well.

Under the Empire, then, both civilian and military personnel were active in capturing animals for spectacles and could, of course, work together to fulfill this objective. Evidence for such collaboration comes from the famous fourth-century "Great Hunt" mosaic from the villa complex at Piazza Armerina in Sicily. This mosaic depicts both civilian and military hunters capturing and transporting various exotic animals in the wild, including an ostrich, rhinoceros, and elephant (Carandini, Ricci, and de Vos 1982: vol. 1: 94–107, 194–230, figs. 106–31 and vol. 2: pls. 27–31; Wilson 1983: 24–5, pls. 11–13, 35, 44, 54–5, 58). The massive size of the mosaic and its central position within the villa suggests that one of the primary duties of the wealthy official who owned the estate was supervising shipments of exotic animals to Rome for shows. The personifications of Africa and India at either end of the mosaic suggest that the hunters working under the official gathered animals from the very ends of the earth, again symbolizing the emperor's power over nature, in this case exercised through a trusted official (Wilson 1983: 24, 97–8).

After the animals for a show arrived at their ultimate destination, they would normally be kept in some sort of enclosure (*vivarium*) prior to the day of their appearance in the arena (Epplert 2003; Scobie 1998: 202–3). In Rome itself, one *vivarium* was located at the southeastern corner of the city, near the Porta Praenestina (Procopius *The Gothic War* 1.22–3). A second enclosure in the capital was evidently overseen by the aforementioned *venatores immunes* of the Praetorian Guard, again illustrating the role played by the Roman military in providing animals for imperial spectacles (*CIL* 6.130, Sabbatini Tumolesi 1988: 26).

Inscriptions mention the personnel who looked after the animals in another facility at Laurentum, some 20 kilometers south of Rome. Two

such texts from the Early Empire, for example, record the presence of a *procurator ad elephantos* and a *praepositus camellorum* in Laurentum (*CIL* 6.8583; *AE* 1971: 68). Two other inscriptions from the environs of Rome, this time dating to the later second century CE, record an *adiutor ad feras* and a *praepositus herbariarum*, although it is not certain whether the officials in question were posted to Laurentum (*CIL* 6.10209, 6.10208). Nonetheless, the existence of officials specifically entrusted with elephants, camels, wild animals, and herbivores indicates that the Romans carefully subdivided the various types and species of animals at such enclosures to ensure that they were looked after as safely and efficiently as possible.

This evidence, in particular the specific reference to wild, as opposed to domesticated animals, indicates that the Romans attempted to breed and raise different species (e.g., elephants, rhinoceroses, various herbivores) in captivity (Aelian *On the Nature of Animals* 2.11; Pliny *Natural History* 8.29; Varro *On Agriculture* 3.12.1; Columella *On Agriculture* 7.2. 4–5). That presumably was less expensive than capturing animals in the wild and shipping them long distances, and it perhaps became even more important in the Late Empire, when importing exotic beasts became more difficult. This may partially explain why higher numbers of herbivores (animals which could more easily be bred in captivity) appear to have featured in the *venationes* of Late Antiquity.

While some officials supervised the care and transport of captured animals, others were responsible for the events in the arena themselves and for the trained *venatores*. In Rome the most senior of these functionaries was the *procurator Ludi Matutini* (“manager of the Morning School”), first attested during the reign of Trajan (*AE* 1972: 574). It is unclear when this particular facility, the main training venue for *venatores* in Rome, first opened. It may have been functioning as early as the reign of Augustus; if so, this would be another example of Augustus’s increasing organization of animal spectacles (Wiedemann 1992: 8).

The number of lesser officials attending to *venationes* and their production appears to have proliferated after Augustus. Inscriptions, for example, attest the existence of an administrative secretary to the *procurator Ludi Matutini* as early as the reign of Caligula and of an early second-century CE official specifically concerned with the clothing of the *venatores* (*CIL* 6.352, 6.8555; Sabbatini Tumolesi 1988: 24, 39–40). Doctors associated with the *Ludus Matutinus* are also attested for the first and second centuries (*CIL* 6.10172; *Inscriptiones Graecae* XIV 1330, Sabbatini Tumolesi 1988: 40–2).

5 The Performers

Similarities existed between *venatores* and gladiators beyond the fact that both had their own specialized training facilities in Rome. Both groups, for example, drew their membership almost exclusively from the lower or marginal classes, such as criminals condemned to fight in the arena as formal punishment for their misdeeds (Kyle 1998: 79–80). Under Augustus some young nobles participated in *venationes* to display their courage and weapons skills, but such aristocratic participation apparently was no longer condoned by the end of the first century CE. Domitian, in fact, executed a former consul on the grounds that he had publicly fought against wild animals (Suetonius *Augustus* 43.2; Dio Cassius 67.14.3).

One important difference between gladiators and *venatores* was that, while gladiators were subdivided into a number of different types based upon their particular equipment and weapons expertise (see Chapter 25), *venatores* were far less diversified in terms of their armament. Although arena hunters periodically carried defensive armor like helmets and shields, more commonly they wore only a simple leather tunic or leather bands over their lower abdomens. They also employed a much more limited selection of weaponry than gladiators; by far their most common weapon was the long hunting spear known as a *venabulum* (Junkleermann 2000: 70–1). Unlike most gladiators, hunters in combats preferred to rely upon their own speed and agility rather than the protection afforded by armor.

Despite their lowly background, *venatores*, like gladiators, could sometimes become star attractions because of their fighting prowess. The most famous of these is the *venator* Carpophorus (Coleman 2006: 140–7) immortalized in the poems Martial wrote to commemorate the opening games of the Colosseum in 80 CE:

That which constituted the crowning glory of your fame,
Meleager, what a small proportion it is of Carpophorus' renown:
the laying low of a boar! He also plunged his spear into a
charging bear, a beast without peer in the region of the Arctic
clime, and he laid low a lion of unheard-of-size, a sight to behold
that would have done credit to the hands of Hercules. (Martial
Spectacles 17, trans. K. Coleman)

Centuries later, the poet Luxorius similarly extolled the exploits of the *venator* Olympius in Vandal-occupied Carthage in the sixth century, showing that the popularity of *venationes* continued at that time, particularly in North Africa (Rosenblum 1961: 151–3, nos. 67–8).

It was not only human arena performers, however, who could earn the approbation of the crowd. Quite apart from those animals who

performed tricks for the pleasure of the spectators, like elephants taught to dance or spar as gladiators (Pliny *Natural History* 8.2), beasts that fought particularly well in the arena, or that were admired for their beauty, could also earn popular acclaim. Occasionally animals were granted *missio*, like gladiators, so they could be preserved for future audiences (Martial *Epigrams* 13.98–100; Ville 1981: 427; Fagan 2011: 126–7). Especially popular and ferocious beasts, at least on occasion, could be pitted against much weaker animals so that they could display their fighting prowess without any real risk of death or serious injury. Sometimes, however, this strategy would backfire, and the “celebrity” animal would be unexpectedly killed by its designated prey as appears to have happened in the case of the popular lion commemorated by Statius in the first century CE:

You are fallen, skilled ravager of tall beasts, not trapped by the surrounding band of Massylian hunters, not propelled by an awesome leap upon the spears, nor tricked by the unseen opening of a pit, but conquered by a fleeing beast . . . the sorrowful populace and senators groaned at your death, as if you had fallen as a famous gladiator on the dismal sand. (*Silvae* 2.5.7–26, trans. C. Epplett)

6 The End of Animal *Spectacula*

In Late Antiquity even more of a premium was put on the lives of arena animals because of the ever-increasing difficulty in procuring them. Although the animal spectacles of this period were still commonly referred to as *venationes*, they were decidedly different from the events of the Republic and Early Empire. In many of the *venationes* of Late Antiquity, the human participants did not actually try to kill the animals they were pitted against but instead entertained the crowd by attempting to evade attacks. They used various means to elude the animals ranging from a simple pole used to vault over an onrushing beast to far more elaborate contraptions. Evidence for such events is found on sixth-century CE diptychs from the Eastern Empire, for example one of those produced to celebrate the games staged by the consul Anastasius in 517 (see [Figure 34.1](#)). Behind the figure vaulting over a bear in the foreground is depicted a large post attached to two large baskets by what appears to be some sort of pulley system. Using the ropes, the two performers in the baskets (at least in theory) were able to elevate themselves and evade the lunges of the bear below. It is important to note that, unlike representations of earlier *venationes*, scenes of animals being killed or wounded are

relatively few; often the humans appear to be in much greater danger than their animal adversaries.

The same shortage of beasts that prompted a change in the nature of *venationes* in Late Antiquity was probably the major factor in their ultimate demise rather than any moral objection to killing animals. The spectators' outrage at the slaughter of elephants at Pompey's event is one of the few recorded instances of public displeasure associated with the killing of animals in shows. It seems that the majority of Romans had no moral objections to the slaughter of animals for entertainment. A *venator* who successfully fought and killed wild beasts in the arena could be seen as providing both an edifying display of his (or her) own bravery and a demonstration of the superiority of skill over brute force (Most 1992: 403–5).

As gladiatorial spectacles disappeared in the later Empire, *venationes* only appear to have increased in popularity (Libanius *Letters* 1399; Ville 1960: 324–5). The problem for contemporary spectacle organizers, though, was to provide a large enough variety and number of animals to make events worthwhile for the audience. Unfortunately, as the Empire, particularly in the West, lost more and more territory in the fourth and fifth centuries CE (including the loss of wildlife-rich North Africa to the Vandals) this objective became progressively more expensive and difficult to fulfill. The *venationes* staged during this period tended to feature common and readily available animals, like bears, rather than the more exotic specimens of earlier spectacles. The last *venationes*, staged in the sixth century, bore only the faintest resemblance to their much more extravagant predecessors. Sports like bearbaiting in the succeeding centuries indicate, of course, that people in formerly Roman territories had not lost their taste for violent animal combat, but such events no longer had the symbolic or political importance of earlier Roman spectacles.

Figure 34.1 Lower register of ivory diptych made for Anastasius showing *venatio*, 517 CE (formerly in Berlin, now lost). *Source:* Photograph from J. Helbig, *L'Art Mosan* (1906), pl. 4.



ABBREVIATIONS

AE = *Année Epigraphique*

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

NOTES

- 1 Varro (*On Agriculture* 3.13.2–3) records that the reenactment of the myth of Orpheus staged in the private enclosure of his contemporary Hortensius differed from contemporary public spectacles only in the absence of African animals.
- 2 Performers who fought against various animals in the arena were also sometimes known as *bestiarii*. Since, however, the same term was often used to denote unarmed criminals mauled to death by beasts in the arena, for the sake of clarity I use the term *venator(es)* to refer to the former group.
- 3 Sources disagree on whether this particular contest first occurred in 99 or 78 BCE. See Pliny *Natural History* 8.7 and Ville 1981: 89.
- 4 The key ancient sources on this point are Pliny *Natural History* 8.7, Suetonius *Julius* 39.3, Appian *The Civil Wars* 2.102, and Dio

Cassius 43.23.3. These sources, and their interpretation, are discussed in Jennison 1937: 57–8 and Scullard 1974: 197–8.

5 A *duumvir* was one of the two highest magistrates in a local city or colony; they acted as a board of two, especially in judicial matters.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

No source provides a more vivid depiction of Roman animal spectacles than Martial's *Spectacles*, particularly the poems celebrating the exploits of the *venator* Carpophorus. Coleman 2006 provides an indispensable commentary upon this work. The biographies of Suetonius and the later *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* often describe various spectacles, including *venationes*, in the course of detailing a particular emperor's reign. On the accounts of *venationes* in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, see Merten 1991. Numerous inscriptions recording animal spectacles can be found in such epigraphic collections as *CIL* and *ILS* (*Inscriptionum Latinae Selectae*). For more specific discussion of such inscriptions in the Western Empire, see the volumes of *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'occidente Roman* (1988–96). Robert 1940 remains an important reference for inscriptions pertaining to *venationes* and other animal events in the Greek East. Dunbabin 1978 and Köhne, Ewigleben, and Jackson 2000 contain many relevant illustrations. Excellent images of the mosaic from Piazza Armerina can be found in Carandini, Ricci, and de Vos 1982.

Allsen 2006 is very helpful for placing Roman animal spectacles in a wider cross-cultural context.

An accessible, concise study of Roman beast hunts, including their Near Eastern and Greek antecedents, can be found in Kyle 2007: 23–37, 259–69. Surveys of gladiatorial spectacles in the Roman Empire (e.g., Ville 1981: 51–6, 88–94, 106–16, 123–8; Wiedemann 1992: 55–67) often contain useful information on Roman animal *spectacula* as well, but few book-length secondary works focus exclusively upon animal spectacles, so Jennison 1937 is still useful on *venationes* and their supporting infrastructure. There are a substantial number of articles on specific aspects of Roman animal spectacles. On the earliest Roman animal spectacles, the elephant displays of the early third century, see Shelton 1999 and 2004. On Roman elites using their personal connections to acquire exotic animals during the Republic, see Deniaux 2000. On the *venatio* staged by Marcus Fulvius Nobilior in 186 BCE, see Rosivach 2006.

For a survey of the logistics of supplying animals to the arena, see Jennison 1937: 137–81. For more recent work on the same subject, see Bertrand 1987; Bomgardner 1992; Epplert 2001 and 2003; and MacKinnon 2006. On hunting corporations in North Africa, see Beschtaouch 1966 and 2006 and Blanchard-Lemée, Ennaïfer, Slim, *et al.* 1996 (1995): 214–15. Edwards 1997 and Potter 2010 provide useful discussions of the origins and status of the various kinds of performers that appeared in Roman arenas.

CHAPTER 35

Spectacular Executions in the Roman World

Chris Epplett

1 Introduction

One of the most common images of ancient Rome in modern-day literature, television, and film is that of Christians being thrown to lions in the arena, and it is commonly assumed that Roman authorities subjected only Christians to such horrific forms of punishment. The following discussion, however, will make clear that a wide variety of people were publicly executed for a broad range of offenses. Furthermore, the modalities of public executions were not limited to *damnatio ad bestias* (“condemnation to the beasts”). As was the case in numerous other premodern societies (Kyle 1998: 133–40), public executions in Rome were a form of spectacle and evolved over time in conjunction with other types of spectacle. However shocking Roman spectacular executions (that is, executions as a form of spectacle) may be to the modern consciousness, it is important to remember that Romans did not stage such events for entertainment alone. As we will see, spectacular executions were believed to play an important role in maintaining a law-abiding citizenry and stable social order.

The evidence for spectacular executions in Rome is abundant. Roman historians, such as Livy, periodically record such events, but perhaps the most valuable literary sources are the works of Martial and Suetonius. These authors were active in the first and second centuries CE and preserve much information about events in their lifetimes, when Roman spectacular executions were at their most extravagant. Martial’s short book of poems entitled *Spectacles (Liber Spectaculorum)* details the elaborate spectacles, including executions,

staged in the Colosseum under the emperors Titus (ruled 79–81 CE) and Domitian (ruled 81–96 CE). Suetonius, in his imperial biographies, describes several elaborate games put on by emperors – games that often included public executions. In addition, early Christian writers, including Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, record, often in gruesome detail, the various tortures and executions that Christian martyrs underwent in Roman arenas. One difficulty in using such martyrologies lies in separating authentic martyrdom accounts from those evidently concocted by overzealous Christian writers.

Other types of evidence also attest to the popularity of spectacular executions. Numerous surviving inscriptions commemorate spectacles, including spectacular executions, staged by *munerarii* or *editores* (individuals who organized games) in communities throughout the Roman Empire. The epigraphic evidence collected by Louis Robert clearly indicates that it was not just the Latin-speaking western half of the Empire that had a fondness for such events. Public executions as part of arena spectacles were clearly popular in the Greek East as well (Robert 1971: 320–1). Some *editores* commissioned artists to memorialize games they organized, and several depictions of the final agonizing moments of the condemned have survived to the present, particularly in mosaics.

2 Origins

Public executions were an established feature of the Roman judicial system as early as the fifth century BCE, when Rome's first written law code, the Twelve Tables, was put into effect. Under the Twelve Tables, crimes such as arson, parricide, and bearing false witness were punishable by execution. Types of public execution at this time included being burnt at the stake (*crematio*), being flogged to death, and being hurled off the Tarpeian Rock.¹ One important legal principle was that the severity of a given sentence should correspond to the severity of the offense committed (Wiedemann 1992: 70). As a particularly literal example, those who committed arson could expect to be burnt at the stake (Table 8, Law 6). In addition, the degradation of criminals subject to public execution was a common feature of Roman justice well into the Roman Empire. The humiliation of the condemned, moreover, did not end with their deaths; Roman authorities routinely mutilated their corpses and denied them proper burial (Kyle 1998: 131–3).

Apart from enforcing obedience to the laws of the state, such punishments – public and violent to the point of being overtly cruel –

were believed to serve a number of different functions. The humiliation of the condemned confirmed and highlighted the authority of those passing sentence and was understood as reestablishing “social order by canceling the criminal’s exercise of rights which he did not have” (Wiedemann 1992: 71). There was also a strong religious dimension; those who had committed serious crimes were considered to have polluted society with their wrongdoing, and their execution served to purify the community. Finally, executing condemned criminals in public ensured that as many citizens as possible could witness punishments and thereby be reassured of the effectiveness of Roman justice and the restoration of social order in the aftermath of its interruption by criminal acts (Coleman 1990: 44–9; Kyle 1998: 40–1, 133–40; Potter 1993: 53–4, 65; Wiedemann 1992: 68–97).

In the Middle Republic (third to second century BCE), some of the most extreme forms of public execution were reserved for deserters from the Roman army and those who had otherwise failed in their military duty to the state, such as allied troops who revolted against Roman authority. The Roman military achieved more and more importance during this period, as Rome expanded her territory across the Mediterranean basin, so it is not surprising that any failure to perform one’s military duty was punished with the utmost severity. The Roman practice of decimation arose from this same general concern to enforce military discipline by any means necessary and to provide a clear object lesson of the dire fate awaiting those convicted of dereliction of duty (Hopkins 1983: 1–2).²

One of the most striking examples of spectacular execution imposed in a military setting occurred in 167 BCE, when the general Aemilius Paullus used elephants to trample to death noncitizen troops who had deserted from his army (Valerius Maximus 2.7.14). It is not a coincidence that the method of execution chosen by Paullus is quite reminiscent of the penalty of *damnatio ad bestias* later carried out in Roman arenas.

Not surprisingly, given Rome’s “warrior mentality,” punishments originally carried out in a military context eventually spread to the public sphere. In the specific instance of *damnatio ad bestias*, as Rome procured an ample supply of wild animals from her conquests in regions such as North Africa, animals were increasingly used for public entertainments, including executions in the arena (see Chapter 34 in this volume). Only 21 years after Paullus’s mass execution of deserters, his son Scipio Aemilianus, in celebrating the conquest of Carthage in North Africa, staged spectacles in Rome that included throwing deserters and fugitive slaves to wild beasts (Valerius Maximus 2.7.13; Livy *Periochae* Book 51; Kyle 1998: 48–9).

In the Late Republic and Early Empire, horrific public executions at Rome and throughout the Empire were generally reserved for those of low social standing such as slaves and prisoners of war. Roman citizens convicted of capital offenses could expect a more “dignified” method of punishment (Garnsey 1970: 221–76; MacMullen 1990: 204; Fagan 2011: 174–5; Wiedemann 1992: 68–9). Many of the specific methods of execution for noncitizens remained, in general terms, the same as they had been under the Early Republic, including crucifixion and *crematio*. By the beginning of the Empire, the Roman public had developed a keen appetite for violent spectator events such as gladiatorial combats and the beast hunts (*venationes*), so, unsurprisingly, execution as a form of public entertainment became a common feature of Roman spectacles.

Public executions under the Late Republic and Empire took a variety of forms, no doubt enhancing their entertainment value for spectators, who would not appreciate viewing the same type of punishment over and over again. Some criminals, rather than being condemned to prompt execution, would instead be sentenced to fight as either gladiators or beast fighters in the arena.³ Although there was a slight chance that they might ultimately earn their freedom if they fought well enough, the expectation on the part of Roman authorities was presumably that those condemned in this fashion would provide some entertainment before suffering a violent death in the arena. Such a sentence was also a useful way for the Roman government to ensure an inexpensive and renewable supply of combatants for the arena (Hopkins 1983: 10–24).

A particularly elaborate form of spectacular execution, one ideally suited to killing off hundreds or even thousands of prisoners of war in a single event, involved the staging of mock naval or land battles in Rome. Although these contests were presented, in a sense, as historical reenactments of famous battles from the past, the participants were expected to fight to the death (Wiedemann 1992: 89–90). Mock naval battles, *naumachiae*, were first staged under Julius Caesar and continued to be staged periodically by subsequent Roman leaders until the reign of Domitian. The largest *naumachia*, said to have involved nineteen thousand prisoners, was arranged by Claudius in 52 CE. The same emperor also organized a mock land battle at Rome that simulated recent victories in Britain and that featured prisoners captured during the campaign (Dio Cassius 61.33.3–4; Suetonius *Claudius* 21.6; Tacitus *Annals* 12.56; Coleman 1990: 70–3; Coleman 1993: 49, 56, 67).

Such events, like the military executions mentioned earlier, clearly symbolized the power of the Roman state and of the ruler staging them. Arguably they served as a reminder of Rome’s time-honored

marital values for a populace that, under the Empire at least, no longer had as much direct experience of war (Hopkins 1983: 1–2). The entertainment value of these spectacles, in certain instances, was enhanced because the outcome did not always conform to that of the battles they ostensibly simulated; such unpredictable outcomes could only heighten spectator interest.

These violent military reenactments, no doubt because of the elaborate preparations necessary, were not produced on a regular basis. A far more common occurrence under the Empire was the execution of individuals or small groups of the condemned on the arena floor.⁴ Under the standard daily schedule of arena events, which emerged during the reign of Augustus, executions were staged during the midday pause, between beast hunts in the morning and gladiatorial combats in the afternoon (Dunkle 2008: 90).

Inscriptions advertising or commemorating various spectacles specifically mention the execution of *noxii* (criminals condemned to death) as one of the attractions of the midday pause. An inscription from Puteoli, for example, records that a local magistrate staged a four-day spectacle featuring four unnamed beasts, 16 bears, an unspecified number of herbivorous animals, and four *noxii* (*ILS* 5063a). The text does not specify exactly how the condemned were executed, but it is likely that some of the animals mentioned in the inscription were used to kill the *noxii*. Another inscription from Italy attests even more clearly to the popularity of arena executions in the Early Empire (*CIL* 9.3437 = *ILS* 5063). The text records another four-day spectacle staged by a local magistrate, this time featuring three days of gladiatorial combat, and a fourth devoted to the execution of condemned criminals. It is significant here that the *editor* devoted an entire day to the *noxii* rather than simply interspersing their executions between gladiatorial bouts in the arena.

Contemporary artwork in various media such as sculptures and mosaics, commissioned to commemorate the generosity of a given *editor*, frequently depicts such arena executions as part of a larger spectacle, once again testifying to their popularity as spectator events. (On spectacle in Roman art, see Chapter 28.) One good example is a late second-century CE mosaic from El-Djem in Tunisia that shows leopards attacking two *noxii*. In one corner of the mosaic a leopard is shown mid-leap while his terrified target looks on. In another corner (see [Figure 35.1](#)), the leopard has already latched on to the face and chest of his victim. In both cases, arena attendants attempt to hold the victim in place to make the animals' task easier (Ben Abed 2006 (2002): 71–7; Blanchard-Lemée, Ennaïfer, Slim, *et al.* 1996 (1995): 215–17; Dunbabin 1978: 66, 259).⁵

Spectacular executions were, of course, subject to many of the

same concerns as other Roman spectator events under the Empire, in particular gladiatorial combats and beast hunts. If, for example, any of these performances became too repetitive or predictable, spectators might become dissatisfied (Wiedemann 1992: 85–6). This was a particularly important consideration for the emperors in Rome since the games they organized in the capital were one of the few occasions during which they could meaningfully interact with their subjects (see Chapter 30). Dissatisfaction with the games given by a particular ruler might, in theory at least, contribute to a more dangerous discontent with his rule in general.

Figure 35.1 Part of a mosaic from El-Djem, Tunisia showing *damnatio ad bestias*, c.180 CE. *Source:* Photograph by Erron Silverstein. Used with permission.



Not surprisingly, then, spectacle organizers, especially emperors in Rome, often sought new ways to make public executions novel and exciting. One method was by extending the suffering of the condemned as long as possible rather than executing them quickly, something which spectators presumably did not find as entertaining. Two of the Christians executed in Lyons during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, for example, were exposed to the beasts in the arena on two separate days and then subsequently tortured by a variety of implements before finally being burnt to death in front of the assembled spectators (Musurillo 2000: 77–81).

3 “Fatal Charades”

An especially elaborate type of spectacular execution took the form of theatrical vignettes that drew inspiration from popular Greek and Roman myths (Coleman 1990; Wiedemann 1992: 83–9). The earliest of such executions recorded, what Kathleen Coleman calls “fatal charades,” occurred in the late 30s BCE, when a bandit leader by the name of Selurus was executed in the Forum Romanum at the behest of Augustus (at this point still known as Octavian). Selurus and his men had terrorized the region surrounding Mt Etna in Sicily for years prior to his capture, which perhaps explains the particularly elaborate nature of his execution. Such a threat to law and order had to be punished in a manner befitting his many offenses against the state. Rather than simply being crucified or thrown to the beasts in the normal manner, Selurus was placed atop a wooden framework meant to represent Mt Etna; at a certain point the structure collapsed causing the condemned man to fall into the wild animal cages positioned below and thereby meet his doom (Strabo 6.273; Coleman 1990: 53–4). This example clearly demonstrates the juxtaposition between Roman justice and theater; the same type of props used in contemporary stage sets could also be employed to add entertainment and drama to executions in arenas.

Although Selurus’s execution did not take any mythical story as its inspiration, it nonetheless shared a certain dramatic flair with later spectacular executions that were, in part, inspired by myth and legend. The reign of Nero (ruled 54–68 CE) seems to have marked a significant shift in this regard. The earliest known execution staged in direct imitation of a myth, a relatively modest example compared to what was to follow, occurred under Nero, when a certain Meniscus was dressed up as Hercules prior to being burnt alive in public (*Palatine Anthology* 11.184; Coleman 1990: 60–1). Nero infamously showed a similar cruel inventiveness in the execution of Christians after the great fire at Rome in 64 CE. Some were disposed of in a manner combining two typical Roman methods of execution: the Christians in question, after having been affixed to crosses during the day, were set on fire as night fell, ostensibly as a source of illumination. Other condemned Christians were dressed up in animal skins and mauled to death by wild dogs (Tacitus *Annals* 15.44). The latter type of execution appears to have been inspired by contemporary beast hunts, illustrating again the influence that other arena events could have upon contemporary public punishments.

Nero probably wished to make the executions he ordered as dramatic and spectacular as possible. As one modern scholar put it, “he exploited to the full the principle of excess and anomaly on which

public shows as an institution in fact depended” (Plass: 1995: 74–5). More importantly, Nero may have sought to counter growing public dissatisfaction with his rule by staging spectacles, including public executions, designed to impress the assembled audience (Coleman 1990: 72–3).

Nero’s executions pale beside those staged under the emperors Titus and Domitian. These executions are recorded by Martial in his *Liber Spectaculorum*, but it is impossible to assign with certainty all of the spectacles recorded in this work to a particular emperor, namely Titus or Domitian. It is preferable, rather, to see Martial’s poems as commemorating a variety of different events staged by the two brothers in the Colosseum over a number of years (Coleman 2006: xlv–lxiv). The elaborate nature of the executions and other events recorded by Martial can no doubt be explained, at least in part, by the desire of these emperors to surpass the spectacles of their predecessors (in particular the hated Nero) and to take full advantage of the possibilities afforded by the magnificent new amphitheater commissioned by their father, the emperor Vespasian, in the heart of Rome. (On the Colosseum, see Chapter 37.)

One of the spectacular executions recorded by Martial involved a criminal, meant to represent a certain Laureolus, who was first suspended from a cross on the arena floor and then mauled to death by a bear (Martial *Liber Spectaculorum* 9). The Laureolus portrayed by the *noxius*⁶ was the subject of a popular mime⁷ in Rome in which the titular character, a bandit, was ultimately captured and crucified for his crimes. His execution in the Colosseum surpassed the mime by not only featuring a real, as opposed to a staged crucifixion, but also by adding a savage bear to the mix, illustrating the emperor’s power to improve upon contemporary theater (Coleman 2006: 82–96; Wiedemann 1992: 84). Another interesting aspect of this execution is that the spectators evidently did not know the specific offense for which the *noxius* who played the part of Laureolus was being executed. Perhaps the organizers did not always consider it necessary to advertise the specific crime of the condemned, only to assure the public that he or she had indeed contravened the laws of Rome (Fagan 2011: 180–1). Also, as the entertainment aspect of such executions became as – or even more – important than their judicial function, perhaps such legal niceties were considered to be superfluous.

The majority of spectacular executions commemorated by Martial in the *Liber Spectaculorum* involved forcing the condemned to play the roles of well-known characters from Greek and Roman myth as part of their punishments, such as the unfortunate “Daedalus” who was mauled to death by a bear (*Liber Spectaculorum* 10; Coleman 2006: 97–100). Two other poems in Martial’s collection (*Liber Spectaculorum* 24–

5; Coleman 2006: 174–85) evidently record the execution of another *noxius*, this time in the guise of Orpheus, through a similar mauling: “Every kind of wild beast was present, mingling with the tame, and many a bird hovered above the bard [i.e., the *noxius* portraying Orpheus]. But Orpheus himself lay torn by an ungrateful bear. This thing alone was done contrary to legend” (*Liber Spectaculorum* 24, ll. 5–8, trans. D. Shackleton Bailey). As this passage suggests, the symbolic importance of such spectacles lay not merely in the emperor’s ability to recreate the world of myth for his subjects but in his ability to subvert it for his purposes as well. In this particular instance, “Orpheus” was not slain by women, as in the myth, but instead was killed by one of the animals brought to the Colosseum through the munificence of the emperor.

The emperor’s ability to recreate the world of myth to his liking as an expression of his power is also clearly expressed in another poem by Martial, one that recounts what may be the most disturbing of the “fatal charades” staged in the Colosseum: “Believe that Pasiphae was mated to the Dictaeon bull; we have seen it, the old legend has won credence. And let not hoary antiquity plume itself, Caesar: whatever Fame sings of, the arena affords you” (*Liber Spectaculorum* 6; Coleman 2006: 62–8). In this instance, a bull was evidently compelled in some fashion to mount an unfortunate female prisoner, recalling the myth of Pasiphae and the bull of Minos, which of course would prove fatal to the woman in question.

Types of execution similar to the one recounted by Martial are suggested in other sources. The first-century CE Christian writer Clement of Rome records women being executed in the guise of the mythical figures Dirce or the daughters of Danaos (*Letter to the Corinthians* 1.5–6). If we assume a correlation between the execution and the way in which the mythical character died, the women executed as Dirce were killed by bulls, but the exact manner of their execution is unclear (Potter 1993: 67). In the later second century CE, the Christian martyr Blandina was also executed in some manner involving a bull, while her subsequent counterparts, Perpetua and Felicitas, as a mockery of their gender, were mauled by a wild cow in the arena as part of their punishment (Musurillo 2000: 79–81; Shaw 1993: 7–8).

Apart from bulls and cows, asses were also evidently used in a similar way to punish women. In the *Metamorphoses* (10.29.34), Apuleius describes a woman in Corinth being condemned to public intercourse with an ass for the crime of poisoning. The *Metamorphoses*, of course, is a work of fiction. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that Apuleius’s account of familiar events, such as contemporary arena spectacles, would have simply been invented by the author with no

correspondence to reality (Coleman 1990: 64). This view appears to be corroborated by a series of clay lamps discovered in Athens, which depict a naked woman being mounted or mauled by an ass. The most common explanation for these lamps and their unusual subject matter is that they provide visual evidence of the type of executions recounted by Apuleius (Wiedemann 1992: 88–9; Hönle and Henze 1981: 58).

As we have seen, authorities punished any perceived threats to social order in a very harsh manner, one considered commensurate with the crime in question, but the accounts of such executions indicate that the Roman authorities took special pains to punish female wrongdoers guilty of capital offenses in a particularly cruel and degrading manner. Apparently such offenders were considered to be doubly dangerous; not only did their crimes in general pose a threat to law and order but the fact that women, traditionally subservient to their male counterparts, would dare to commit such offenses presented in and of itself another challenge to social order. Hence, especially humiliating punishments, such as forcing women to be mounted and killed by bulls, a powerful symbol of male virility, were designed to reassure spectators that not only law and order but also traditional gender roles within patriarchal Roman society had been reestablished (Shaw 1993: 8–9, 16–19).

4 Popularity

The extant literary sources contain little in the way of criticisms of spectacular executions. Tacitus, for example, in recounting Nero's execution of Christians following the great fire in Rome, has no apparent problem, in general, with the public execution of criminals. Rather, he takes issue with Nero's ordering of such excessively cruel executions to distract attention from his own possible guilt, not in order to uphold law and order (Plass 1995: 54; Kyle 1998: 244–5; Fagan 2011: 179–80). (For further discussion of critiques of spectacle, see Chapter 41.)

Part of the popularity of public executions lay in their psychological effect upon Roman spectators. Such punishments have been described, for example, as a liminoid ritual in which the extreme level of violence used to execute the *noxii*, unacceptable in everyday society, allowed the assembled spectators to release their own pent-up tensions (Plass 1995: 32). In addition, as various accounts make abundantly clear, spectators at public trials and executions were often able to play an active role in the proceedings through their

expressions of approval or disapproval directed at the presiding magistrate, a fact which no doubt enhanced the appeal of these occasions for people who did not hold such power over life and death in their everyday lives (Fagan 2011: 133–7; cf. Potter 1996: 149–51, 155–9).

On a more basic level, the violence of such executions exercised an undeniable fascination upon Roman spectators, the same fascination evident among spectators at public hangings and the like in more recent times (Thompson 2002: 30–1). Significantly, those Roman writers who criticized arena executions did not generally do so on the grounds of their unsuitability as a judicial punishment but rather because of what they saw as the dangerous passions and bloodlust they unleashed in spectators. As Seneca states: “Granted that, as a murderer, he deserved this punishment [execution in the arena], what crime have you committed, poor fellow, that you should deserve to sit and see this show?” (*Letters from a Stoic* 7.5, trans. R. Gummere; cf. Thompson 2002: 31–4).

5 Spectacular Executions in the Later Empire

“Fatal charades” of the type described by Martial appear to have continued sporadically in the Empire until at least the late second century CE. Tertullian, writing at that date, records criminals in the guise of Hercules being burnt alive in the arena as well as others, dressed up as the god Attis, evidently forced to castrate themselves (*Apology* 15.4–5; Coleman 1990: 60–1). Such violent charades are absent from the subsequent literary record, but this may simply be because of the relatively limited number of sources available for the period. What is certain is that arena executions in general achieved an even greater level of popularity in the later Roman Empire.

By the second century CE at the latest, *noxii* had become a relatively inexpensive commodity who could be sold by the imperial government as a substitute for more expensive gladiators. An imperial edict of 177 CE, for example, stipulated that the state would sell condemned criminals at the maximum sum of six *aurei* each for the sacrifices featured in the festival of the Three Gauls, an event which had previously featured much more expensive gladiators. As a point of comparison, and to illustrate how much of a saving this represented to festival organizers, the different categories of gladiators mentioned in the same text ranged in price from 30 to 150 *aurei* each (Carter 2003:

86–8; Oliver and Palmer 1955: 324–6, 340–3). As gladiatorial games became even more expensive to produce and began to disappear in the succeeding century, the public execution of *noxii*, conversely, became even more popular as a substitute violent entertainment for the assembled spectators. Third-century CE legislation, in fact, specifically instructed provincial governors, in effect, to reserve any of their condemned criminals with an unusually keen fighting spirit for the emperor's spectacles in Rome (MacMullen 1990: 206–7; Hopkins 1983: 10).

The proliferation of capital punishments under the Roman legal system, particularly from the third century onwards, ensured that there was no shortage of “recruits” for such events. The number of crimes punishable by execution steadily rose after the late second century until, by the reign of Constantine, some 60 offenses were legally punishable by death (as opposed to some 17 during the Early Empire). In addition, the severity of punishment for such crimes increased; some offenses, for example, which had previously merited a relatively “banal” method of execution like simple decapitation were now subject to far more spectacular punishments, like *crematio* or *damnatio ad bestias* (MacMullen 1990: 207–11).

Several reasons have been suggested for this increase in judicial severity, many of which involve the changing status and role of the emperor in the Late Empire. One possible factor may have been the growing number of rulers who emerged from military backgrounds to take the throne. As noted, harsh disciplinary measures were an established aspect of Roman military justice, so it seems credible that emperors with extensive military backgrounds might implement such a standard of punishment for civilian offenders as well. Also, as the Empire moved toward a more autocratic system of government, and the emperor became a much more exalted figure in comparison to his subjects, dire punishments previously confined to the lower classes (*humiliores*) were now employed routinely against their social betters (*honestiores*) as well. The widening gulf between the emperor and his subjects made preexisting class distinctions within the latter group less important at least as far as the Roman legal system was concerned (MacMullen 1990: 212–17).⁸

Another important change in legal procedure, which may also have contributed to the increased severity of contemporary punishments, was the growing use of *cognitiones* (extraordinary inquiries) from the late second century CE onwards. Under this form of trial procedure, a single magistrate heard the facts of a given case and passed sentence, which was not subject to appeal (Garnsey 1968: 157). Accordingly, a given official entrusted with such wide-ranging judicial authority might be tempted to pronounce a particularly severe sentence as an

illustration of his power, especially if he viewed the accused as a legitimate threat to such or when the public was clamoring for as harsh a punishment as possible (Thompson 2002: 36–7).

Vivid depictions of these *cognitiones* in action are to be found in Christian martyrdom accounts dating from the late second to the early third century CE, which confirm the arbitrary nature of such proceedings. In many such accounts, the specific charge brought against the accused is not at all clear. The Christian refusal to perform such activities as offering sacrifice on behalf of the emperors could certainly be viewed as treasonous obstinacy in some circles, and their *contumacia* (obstinacy) alone, then, might provide adequate grounds for capital charges to be levied against them, particularly in the harsher legal climate of the later Empire (Musurillo 2000: lvii–lxii; Barnes 1968: 44–50).

The magistrates presiding over such *cognitiones* had considerable discretionary power over the method of execution inflicted upon the condemned, in part because they were not limited by a specific punishment attached to a specific charge. The governor who tried and condemned Polycarp and other Christians in the late second century CE, for example, threatened them with both *crematio* and *damnatio ad bestias* before being informed that the animals necessary for the latter punishment were no longer available (Musurillo 2000: 11–13). Even more significantly, a presiding magistrate could be swayed by public opinion to break the law himself in condemning the accused; one of the Christians executed in the arena of Lyons, a man who as a Roman citizen should have only been beheaded, was instead condemned to the beasts along with his noncitizen compatriots (MacMullen 1990: 205–6; Musurillo 2000: 75–9).

Such public executions did not disappear with the subsequent emergence of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire. Even penalties such as *damnatio ad bestias*, commonly employed against Christians in the past, continued to be practiced even after the fall of the Western Empire. The eastern emperor Anastasius (ruled 491–518 CE) is credited with banning beast hunts, a ban which apparently included condemnation to the beasts. This measure, however, appears to have been motivated as much by concern over the unruly behavior of spectators at such events as by the emperor's concern over the suffering of the condemned. *Damnatio ad bestias* reappears as a judicial punishment in the legislation of Justinian (ruled 527–65 CE) but seems largely to have fallen out of use until briefly revived by the emperor Phocas (602–10 CE). Among the crimes attributed to this despotic emperor was the condemnation of malcontents to the beasts (Epplett 2004).

In general, however, moral outrage does not appear to have been

the primary factor in the gradual disappearance of spectacular executions from the former territories of the Roman Empire. As gladiatorial events and beast hunts disappeared in the fifth and sixth centuries, in large part because the state no longer possessed the funds to stage them, the associated spectacles of the arena also fell by the wayside. Perhaps part of the reason why *damnatio ad bestias* was considered an unacceptable form of punishment by the early seventh century is that the last recorded beast hunts in the Eastern Empire had been staged decades earlier under Justinian and the former ruler's subjects were no longer acclimatized to such a form of execution. Nevertheless, grisly public executions outside of an arena setting continued to be a staple of justice systems in the former territories of the Roman Empire for centuries thereafter.

ABBREVIATIONS

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

ILS = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*

NOTES

1 On the Twelve Tables, see Crawford 1996: no. 40.

2 Decimation was a punishment inflicted on military units that had displayed cowardice or had refused orders. It involved the execution of one-tenth of the members of a unit, with the victims chosen by lot and executed by the other members of their unit. See Pickford 2005 and Sage 2008: 225–9. On the general subject of discipline in the Roman army, see Phang 2008 and Southern 2006: 145–9.

3 On the origins and status of the various kinds of performers that appeared in Roman arenas, see Edwards 1997 and Potter 2010.

4 Hornum 1993 traces strong connections between the cult of Nemesis, judicial punishments in the arena, and the demonstration of imperial power.

5 Sometimes the condemned were tied to carts and wheeled out onto the arena floor, presumably to make the arena attendants' task somewhat safer. See the late first-century CE gladiator mosaic from Zliten in Libya (Aurigemma 1926: 131–201, fig. 77, pl. D; Dunbabin 1978: 66, 278, figs. 46–9).

6 A *noxius* in the context of spectacles is a hated, condemned, and doomed person, such as a criminal, captive, or rebellious slave.

7 On mimes, see Chapter 25 in this volume.

8 Discussing Christian martyrdoms, Potter (1993: 69–71) notes the public unrest that could sometimes be provoked by the condemnation of high-status defendants to punishments such as *damnatio ad bestias* that traditionally were reserved for the lower classes.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum* provides some of our most important evidence for spectacular executions in Rome. An indispensable commentary to this work can be found in Coleman 2006. Christian martyrdom accounts from the later Empire also provide important evidence for such events, although their testimony cannot always be taken at face value. Musurillo 2000 is still perhaps the most useful translation of and commentary upon the most important martyrdom accounts. More recent treatments of Christian martyrdom in the Roman Empire can be found in Shaw 1993; Potter 1993; and Thompson 2002. Numerous inscriptions recording the execution of *noxii* are to be found in such epigraphic collections as *CIL* and *ILS*. More specific discussion of such inscriptions in the Western Empire can be found in the volumes of *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'occidente Roman* (1988–96), while Robert 1971 is still an important reference for inscriptions pertaining to arena spectacles in the Greek East.

Broader surveys of gladiatorial events in the Empire, such as those of Wiedemann 1992: 68–97 and Hopkins 1983: 2–3, 10–24, often contain useful discussion of spectacular executions as well. More specific works on the topic include Kyle 1998, whose work not only deals with public execution in Rome but also with the issue of how Rome disposed of the corpses of the condemned. On “fatal charades” in the arena, Coleman 1990 remains the seminal work (cf. Coleman 1993). Hornum 1993 associates the cult of Nemesis with punishment in the arena. Readers interested in the legal background to spectacular executions can consult MacMullen 1990. Finally, Potter 1996 provides a useful discussion of Roman judicial methods and the role of popular sentiment in trial proceedings under the Empire.

CHAPTER 36

Greek Sports in Rome

Hugh M. Lee

1 Introduction

In 86 CE the emperor Domitian initiated his Capitoline Games in the city of Rome. Just as the Olympics were held in honor of Olympian Zeus, the new games celebrated Capitoline Jupiter and, like the Olympics, they took place every four years. They subsequently gained a prestige equal to the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games and continued to be held into the fourth century. Domitian himself presided at the Capitoline Games (Herodian 1.9.2–3), a role that later emperors replicated (Caldelli 1993: 108–12; Spawforth 2007: 383).

Unlike the Olympics, the program of Domitian's new games was tripartite, consisting of gymnastic, equestrian, and musical competitions (Suetonius *Domitian* 4.4). In the first category were the traditional events of Greek athletics: boxing, wrestling, *pankration*, the pentathlon, and four different footraces (*stadion*, *diaulos*, *dolichos*, *hoplitodromos*) (Caldelli 1993: 86–9).¹ There was also, however, a competition involving females. According to Suetonius, “In the stadium there were races even between maidens” (*Domitian* 4.4, trans. J. Rolfe). By this date the Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games, as well as other festivals, included footraces for females (Lee 1988). Races for girls were never part of the Olympic program, although unmarried girls (*parthenoi*) raced in the stadium at Olympia every four years at games in honor of Hera (Pausanias 5.16.2–7; see Chapter 16 in this volume). Like the Olympics, the Capitoline Games also included several equestrian contests, but they diverged from the Olympics in that musical competitions were part of the program. There was, however, well-established precedent for holding musical

competitions as part of festivals that featured gymnastic and equestrian events; the most prominent example of such a festival was the Pythian Games held at Delphi in honor of Apollo. (On the Pythian Games at Delphi, see Chapter 11.)

To further enhance the grandeur of his games, Domitian constructed new facilities in the Campus Martius: a stadium for the athletic events and an adjoining music hall (*odeum*) for the musical events (see [Map 25.1](#)). The equestrian contests were held in the Circus Maximus. Domitian's stadium, which seated approximately thirty thousand, was the only permanent venue constructed for Greek athletics in the western half of the Roman Empire. Instead of the rectangular shape and the grass seating of older stadia such as the one at Olympia, the new stadium followed more recent trends (see Chapter 38). It was built of stone in an elongated horseshoe shape familiar to us from the second-century CE stadia at Delphi and Athens. Domitian's stadium does not survive, but its outline can be seen today in the shape of the Piazza Navona, and portions of the substructure can be viewed from outside the Piazza under the modern buildings at the curved end. Traces of the musical venue are also visible. A pillar survives *in situ* near the straight end of the stadium, and the curved façade of the *odeum* is preserved in that of the sixteenth-century Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne on Via Corso Emanuele.²

These new venues enabled Domitian to leave his own monumental mark on the urban landscape. Construction on the Colosseum had commenced during the reign of his father Vespasian, and his brother, the emperor Titus, dedicated the building in 80 CE. In little more than half a decade, two major facilities for sport and spectacle were completed under the Flavian emperors. With the Circus Maximus and the Colosseum, Rome had already enjoyed unparalleled arenas for chariot racing and gladiatorial combats. The addition of Domitian's stadium made Rome truly unrivalled as the capital of the world for athletic spectacles.

The Capitoline Games and the facilities built to accommodate them are a testament to the importance of Greek sport in Rome. The words "sport in Rome" usually conjure up images of chariot races in the Circus Maximus and bloody gladiatorial combats in the Colosseum, and there can be no doubt about the popularity of these events in Rome itself and in the Roman world as a whole. It is, however, also true that sport of the sort found from an early period in the Greek world continued to be widely practiced in the eastern half of the Roman Empire, which was heavily influenced by Greek culture. Moreover, Greek sport found a significant place in the city of Rome and achieved some degree of acceptance in the western half of the Roman Empire more generally.

2 Greek Sports Come to Rome

The establishment of the Capitoline Games in 86 CE marked the culmination of a long journey. The philhellenic Romans had taken much longer to embrace Greek sport than they had other aspects of Hellenic culture. Centuries earlier, however, residents of Rome could observe Greek athletics on Italic soil in cities founded by Greeks in southern Italy and Sicily, including ancient Neapolis (modern Naples). (On sport in these Greek cities, see Chapter 12.) Furthermore, the Etruscans to the north of Rome manifested some fondness for Greek athletics to judge from frescoes like those in the sixth-century BCE Tomb of the Olympiad and objects found in tombs such as Attic vases depicting athletics and bronze figurines of athletes (see Chapter 26).

The first examples of Greek athletic contests held in Rome remind us of American professional football teams playing in Europe or European soccer teams staging matches in the United States. They were onetime exhibitions that, in most cases, did not feature the complete athletic program of a festival like the Olympic Games but rather selected events, usually boxing and wrestling. Often they comprised part of a larger program that included Roman chariot racing, gladiatorial fights, and beast hunts. (On beast hunts, see Chapter 34.)

In 217 BCE, one Aulus Postumius appears to have staged Greek contests in Rome (Crowther 2004: 381–2). Dionysius of Halicarnassos writes that a procession from the Capitol through the Forum to the Circus Maximus included charioteers, followed by “contestants in both the light and the heavy games, their whole bodies naked except their loins” (7.72.1–3, 7.73.1–3). In the parlance of Greek sports, the light events were the footraces, long jump, discus, and javelin (the latter three typically held as part of the pentathlon), and the heavy events were boxing, wrestling, and *pankration*. Dionysius adds, “After the chariot-races were over, those who competed with their own bodies entered, that is, runners, boxers, and wrestlers.”³ These games of Postumius would thus not seem to have included the pentathlon. It is not clear if the program of equestrian events followed Greek or Roman models.

Livy tells us that more than forty years later, in 186 BCE, M. Fulvius Nobilior held games in Rome that included both Greek contests and a Roman-style beast hunt, or *venatio*: “Also a contest of athletes [*athletarum*] was then for the first time made a spectacle for the Romans and a hunt of lions and leopards was given” (39.22.1–2, trans. E Sage, slightly modified). The athletes were brought from Greece. Livy seems unaware of Postumius’s contests held in the

previous century. Unfortunately, the text does not tell us the extent of the program.

In 167 BCE, the praetor Lucius Anicius put on an exhibition of music and boxing:

“In the circus he built a huge stage for imported Greek performers, first musicians and a chorus and later four boxers” (Polybius 30.22.2, 10–12 = Athenaeus 14.615; trans. by W. Paton).

Sulla, after completing victorious military campaigns in the eastern Mediterranean, staged in 80 BCE a celebration that seems to have included holding the Olympics in Rome instead of Olympia (Appian *The Civil Wars* 1.99; Eusebius *Chronika* ll. 342–4 Christesen and Martirosova Torlone 2006). (One event, the boys’ *stadion*, was held in Olympia.) This would be the first unequivocal example of a full-scale athletic festival being held in Rome.⁴

The decade of the 50s in the first century BCE witnessed three examples of Greek games in Rome. In 58 BCE M. Aemilius Scaurus held games (Valerius Maximus 2.4.7), though their scale is not known. When Pompey dedicated his new theater in the Campus Martius in 55 BCE, he held both musical contests and Greek competitions (*agonos gymnikou*) in that venue (Dio Cassius 39.38.1–2). With contests restricted to the new building, the only athletic events that could have been held would have been boxing, wrestling, and *pankration*. Horse races and beast hunts took place in the Circus Maximus as part of these games (Plutarch *Pompey* 52.4). Greek contests were mixed with Roman spectacles, as they had been in the games of M. Fulvius Nobilior. This pattern of a limited athletic program was to continue throughout the first century BCE. In 52 BCE Scribonius Curio also held contests in a theatrical venue. He constructed two theaters that could be either rotated to form an amphitheater or revolved 90 or 180 degrees (it is not known for certain which) so as to form two theaters, with the audiences sitting either side by side or back-to-back. According to Pliny (*Natural History* 36.24.120), Curio “furnished athletes” (*athletas edidit*), who must have been boxers and wrestlers. Even in its amphitheater configuration, this venue would have been too small for footraces or the javelin throw.

Following his victory over Pompey, Julius Caesar held triumphal games in 46 BCE that included stage plays, gladiatorial combats, chariot races in the Circus, a mock naval battle in an artificial lake in the Campus Martius, and Greek sports (Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 39.1). For the Greek games he built a temporary stadium in the Campus Martius, so he seems to have put on a full athletic program. While Caesar’s Greek games resembled those of Sulla, they were somewhat obscured amid the other spectacular extravaganzas of his triumphal

games. According to Cicero (*Letters to Atticus* 15.4.5), Brutus, the future assassin of Caesar, held Greek games in 44 BCE, but we know nothing about the program.

Augustus was much more active than his predecessors in promoting Greek games. In 31 BCE, he defeated Mark Antony at Actium in Epiros in Greece. In celebration of his victory he founded the Actia there in 29 BCE, an isolympic festival, that is, one modeled on the Olympics.⁵ The Actia was held in Augustus's new city of Nikopolis, which was built near the battlefield. On Italian soil more than three decades later in 2 CE, another athletic festival, the isolympic Sebasta, was founded in Naples to honor Augustus (Crowther 2004: 93–8; Geer 1935).

What about in Rome itself? In the *Res Gestae* (22), Augustus proclaims that he had held three sets of Greek games in the city, none of them permanent like the Actia in Nikopolis and the Sebasta in Naples. The first were the Actian Games of 28 BCE, which included Greek athletics: “On the present occasion, moreover, a gymnastic contest was held, a wooden stadium having been constructed in the Campus Martius” (Dio Cassius 53.1.5; cf. Suetonius *Augustus* 43.2). The use of a stadium implies a full athletic program. The Augustalia of 19 BCE seems to have been the second (Dio Cassius 54.10, 34; see Crowther 2004: 385). The third may have been games held in 12 BCE to celebrate his appointment as Pontifex Maximus, during which a pair of boxers performed (Suetonius *Augustus* 44.3; *Res Gestae* 10). According to Suetonius (*Augustus* 44.2–3), Augustus barred women from attending these Greek contests, though they were allowed to view gladiatorial combats. The obvious reason seems to have been the complete nudity of the athletes, whereas gladiators wore at least some kind of covering around their loins (Crowther 2004: 375–9).

We may only speculate as to why neither a philhellene like Augustus nor his immediate successors established permanent Greek games in Rome. Caligula held games in 38 and 39 CE (Dio Cassius 59.9.6–7, 59.13.9). Of the former we have no details except that he held a gymnic competition; for the latter we are told that “athletes competed in the *pankration* in many different places at the same time.” The emperor Claudius held games in 44 CE in which Greek athletics were employed as entertainment between the horse races: “For between the different races, bears were slain, athletes competed, and boys summoned from Asia performed the Pyrrhic dance” (Dio Cassius 60.23.5).

The last Julio-Claudian emperor, Nero, was the first to establish a quadrennial Greek athletic festival in Rome (Suetonius *Nero* 12.3–4). Called the Neroneia, it was first celebrated in 60 CE and consisted of gymnic, equestrian, and musical events. Nero also dedicated a bath

and gymnasium at this time. The tripartite program was, as we have seen, imitated by Domitian for the Capitoline Games. The Neroneia was held a second time in 65 CE (Tacitus *Annals* 16.2). This festival was discontinued after Nero's death. Thus, Domitian, when inaugurating his Capitoline Games, not only resumed a long tradition of Greek athletics in Rome, but also gave them the permanent status which Nero had attempted to confer.

Other Greek athletic festivals were established in Rome during the later Empire. Elagabalus founded the Antoninia Pythia in 219 or 220 CE; Severus Alexander, the Agon Herculeus, perhaps in 228 (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae Severus Alexander* 35.4); Gordian III, the Agon Minervae, in c.242; and Aurelian, the Agon Solis, in 274 (Robert 2010: 125–31, 139–40; Caldelli 1993: 46–52; Newby 2005: 36–7). The first two may have been held only once.

Thus, under the sponsorship of prominent Romans including the emperor, Greek athletics indisputably found a place in Rome next to chariot racing and gladiatorial contests, initially as exhibitions, but later as a key part of permanent festivals.

3 Venues in Rome for Greek Sports

If Domitian's stadium was the first and only permanent facility in the western half of the Roman Empire for Greek athletics, where were earlier Greek contests held in Rome? As noted above, events like boxing and wrestling did not need a large space, and a theater would have sufficed, whereas the running and throwing events and the discus and javelin would have required a larger field. Greek stadia measured approximately 200 meters long. Thus, for the Greek running events, a long enough venue was a prerequisite. This could be a flat, open field in which temporary seats could be set up; such a field would also obviously suffice for boxing and wrestling. It has been suggested that the location in the Campus Martius used in the Greek games sponsored by Julius Caesar and Augustus was the same as the site used later by Domitian for his stadium (Lee 2000: 222–4; Crowther 2004: 385; Coarelli 1997: 20). For his Neroneia, Nero used a building called the Saepta or Saepta Julia, which was also located in the Campus Martius. It was rectangular in shape and measured 310 by 120 meters on the exterior and 286 by 94 meters on the interior (Richardson 1992: 340–1). It was thus more than large enough for the stadium events of a Greek athletic festival. Augustus, Caligula, and

Claudius had used this structure previously for gladiatorial contests. Why did Nero not use the site employed by Caesar and Augustus, which was adjacent to his baths? Perhaps Nero had used this location for a wooden amphitheater constructed for gladiatorial games held in 57 CE (Suetonius *Nero* 12.1; Coarelli 1997: 20).⁶

Finally, as we have seen in the examples of the Greek games of Postumius, Anicius, and Claudius, the Circus Maximus in its various incarnations was available for Greek athletics. The valley between the Aventine and Palatine hills measures a half-mile in length. After the renovation by Julius Caesar, the hippodrome measured 621 meters long (Richardson 1992: 85). The side of the track adjoining the Palatine hill was in all likelihood employed for Greek games, with the track marked out by white lines (Humphrey 1986: 84–91 and fig. 36). Statues of Greek athletes appear to have been a part of the decoration of the Circus Maximus. A fourth-century CE mosaic from Piazza Armerina depicts statues of two runners and perhaps a boxer above the starting gates and two discus throwers on the *spina* (the central divider of the track; Lee 2000: 230; Humphrey 1986: 226 and figs. 66, 112–14).⁷ Another mosaic, perhaps also from the fourth century, shows two runners, a pair of boxers or wrestlers, and two discus throwers on the *spina* (Humphrey 1986: 235–8 and fig. 119). Why sculptures of Greek athletes in the Circus Maximus? The obvious implication is that Greek athletics were held there.

Indeed, the use of the Circus Maximus for Greek athletics helps us to understand where, in the absence of permanent stadia, Greek athletics were held in the West (see Chapter 38). Hippodromes existed in many cities throughout the western Mediterranean and could readily serve as athletics venues. Such a practice may also give some hint of the relative popularity of Greek athletics in the western half of the Roman Empire, where there was interest but not enough to commit the capital and land for a permanent stadium. Again, in modern sport we find some parallels. American football is played in rugby or soccer stadia in Europe and soccer matches are often held in American football stadia in the United States.

A commemorative coin of 244 CE suggests that the venue for gymnastic and equestrian contests of the Agon Minervae of 242 CE, as well as the gladiatorial combats, was the Circus Maximus (Mancioli 1987: 26 and fig. 11; Stevenson, Smith, and Madden 1889: 203). In the upper half of the coin the Circus Maximus is identifiable by the obelisk in the *spina* and the three-pronged *metae* at each end. To the left of the obelisk we observe a two-horse chariot, while to the right can be seen a four-horse chariot. In the upper right, a Nike, goddess of victory, bestows a wreath upon a charioteer who bears a palm branch and stands in a six-horse chariot. On the lower register are placed 10

figures portrayed in much larger scale than those in the upper. At the left and right are pairs of gladiators in combat. Between the gladiators are three pairs of athletes in the Greek heavy events: from left to right, boxers, pankratiasts, and wrestlers (Lee 2000: 231–2).⁸

4 A Clubhouse for the Guild of Athletes

Further confirmation of the importance of Greek athletics in Rome can be seen in the building of a clubhouse (*curia athletarum*) by the *synodos*, the international guild of athletes (on which, see Caldelli 1992 and, in the present volume, Chapter 6). The *synodos* constructed this clubhouse in the second century CE in the Baths of Trajan, which was then the newest and largest of the great imperial baths (*thermae*) in the city. As with the sponsoring of Greek games, the decision to build the clubhouse was made at the highest levels. In 134 CE the guild requested from the emperor permission and support to erect this building, and Hadrian replied in the affirmative (*Inscriptiones Graecae* XIV 1054b). The donation did not actually occur, however, until 143 CE, under Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius: "I have ordered that a plot be handed over to you where you may keep your trophies and records in the area of the baths which were erected by my deified grandfather Trajan just where you congregate for the Capitoline Games" (*Inscriptiones Graecae* XIV 1055b; Yegül 1992: 175–7; see Miller 2004: 170–1 for an English translation). Both Hadrian and Antoninus addressed themselves to M. Ulpius Domesticus, formerly a highly successful pankratiast, who was chief priest of the guild and the baths.

Why locate the clubhouse in the Baths of Trajan? Going to the baths was a quintessential Roman activity that served hygienic, social, and recreational purposes. After the first century CE large public bath complexes in Rome typically included exercise grounds as well as lecture halls and libraries. Some form of stadium also became a regular feature of Roman *thermae*, including the third-century CE Baths of Caracalla (Nielsen 1993: vol. 1: 53–5, 163–7; Richardson 1992: 83). It is, therefore, not surprising that the athletes for the Capitoline Games frequented the Baths of Trajan and that the clubhouse was located there. Reinforcing the connection between baths and athletics are representations of athletes, the most notable example being the two large hemispherical mosaics that were located near the exercise areas in the Baths of Caracalla and that realistically

depict athletes, officials, and trainers (Newby 2005: 67–76, figs. 3.10–11; Insalaco 1989). In nearby Ostia, from the baths near the Porta Marina and the Baths of Neptune, there are depictions of athletic competitions (Newby 2005: 49–55, figs. 3.2–3).

5 Greek Sports as Exercise in Rome

In the Greek world there existed a continuum between those who worked out in local *gymnasia* and the star athletes who won in the great Panhellenic games. The best of the former, by proving their mettle through local contests, could aspire to compete in Panhellenic festivals. Do the establishment of the Capitoline Games and the presence of athletes in the baths indicate that the Romans had finally come to fully adopt Greek athletics? The answer is negative. No Roman victor is listed in the surviving evidence for the athletic contests of the Capitoline Games, although a few are found for the equestrian and musical events (Caldelli 1993: 90, 123–63). Greek gymnastic education never became a cultural institution practiced widely by the male populace of Rome, and a native Roman who pursued an athletic career was a rarity.

Yet it is important to recognize that there was a significant degree of familiarity with Greek sport as exercise. Horace (*Odes* 1.8.11–12, 3.12.8–9) describes the Campus Martius as a place where the discus, javelin, running, and boxing were practiced, and it was there that both Agrippa and Nero built their baths. It is revealing that Quintilian, in his voluminous *Institutes of Oratory*, an instructional work on oratory, employs numerous figures of speech and references that assume his readers were familiar with Greek sports (Grodde 1997). Romans as individuals could indulge their fondness for Greek sport. Particularly notable examples of Romans with a special attachment to Greek sport include Scipio Africanus (Plutarch *Cato Maior* 3.7; Livy 29.19.11), the emperor Alexander Severus (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae Severus Alexander* 27, 35.4), and the aristocratic ladies shown on the fourth-century CE “Bikini mosaic” from Piazza Armerina in Sicily (Carandini, Ricci, and de Vos 1982: vol. 1: 150–6, figs. 73–5, 77 and vol. 2: pl. 17; Lee 1984). In the public baths one could exercise as little or as much as one wanted. The decorations, whether the realistic depictions of athletes on mosaics or the idealized athletic bodies shown in sculpture, could serve as a connection or inspiration both to those who worked out or to those who were merely fans. Did Romans

exercise in the nude? While nude bathing became acceptable, the evidence for exercise is not clear-cut (Hallett 2005: 78–83).

To be sure, prominent Roman writers such as Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* 4.70), Pliny the Younger (*Letters* 4.22.3, 7), Seneca (*Letters from a Stoic* 89.18–19), and Tacitus (*Annals* 14.20) criticize Greek sport, finding it effete, useless, or immoral, with pederasty, which was closely linked to *gymnasia*, especially criticized. The vehement negative reaction, however, may well be a sign of a growing acceptance of Greek sport, whether as spectacle or exercise. The Roman critics of Greek athletics may have been protesting too much. Rome modeled itself on the great urban centers of the East, and a major athletic festival like the Capitoline Games, along with a full suite of venues for sport, would have been marks of the city's sophistication. (For further discussion of Roman critiques of Greek sport, see Chapter 41.)

6 Conclusion

Greek sports found a place in Rome alongside chariot racing and gladiatorial combats, culminating in Domitian's establishment of the Capitoline Games and the construction of a permanent stadium for them in the Campus Martius. Similarly, Greek athletic festivals in the East were held under imperial auspices. Support for athletic festivals in the capital and throughout the Empire cannot be separated from political and cultural policy (Spawforth 2007: 378–80). Rome's importance as a center for Greek sports found further confirmation with the establishment, again with imperial consent, of an athletic clubhouse in the Baths of Trajan for the international guild of athletes. The Roman baths could also provide a suitable space for any who wished to pursue a Hellenic form of exercise.

Rome's rise to prominence as a center for Greek sports should also be seen in relation to the entire history of Greek athletics. It has been claimed that the golden age of Greek athletics occurred in the early centuries of the Olympics, followed by a centuries-long decline, which continued into the Roman era (see Kyle 1997). However, Pausanias's description of Olympia, which is corroborated by the archaeological evidence, shows the sanctuary to be at its largest and most impressive extent in the second century CE. At no other time were Greek athletics as widespread. The Olympics had become "ecumenical" (Scanlon 2002: 37–64). Consequently, one could well argue that the golden age of Greek athletics actually occurred, with Roman encouragement and endorsement, during the second century CE. The establishment of the

Capitoline Games in the preceding century was an important element in this process. Even without the wholesale adoption of Greek gymnastic education, the capital of the world was a major player in the golden age of Greek athletics.

NOTES

- 1 These events were called “gymnic” (literally in Greek *gymnikoi agones*) because, unlike the equestrian events, they were performed in the nude. On the events in Greek athletic competitions such as the Olympics, see Chapter 1 in this volume.
- 2 On Domitian’s stadium and *odeum*, see Lee 2000: 229–30 and *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* 4. 341–4. The definitive work on the stadium is Colini 1943.
- 3 All translations from the work of Dionysius of Halicarnassos and of Dio Cassius found in this essay are taken from the relevant volumes in the Loeb Classical Library, which were translated by E. Cary. In some cases, Cary’s translations have been slightly modified to make the original sense of the text clearer.
- 4 Matthews 1979: 241, challenging the belief that the games Sulla held in Rome were a transplanted Olympics, states, “What Sulla does seem to have done is to have a held a rival competition which proved a strong counterattraction for the athletes.” Newby 2005: 26, n. 27, concurs with Matthews.
- 5 For further discussion of the term “isolympic,” see Chapter 6.
- 6 Richardson 1992: 10–11 suggests that Nero’s amphitheater was instead part of the complex of his baths, though this seems incongruous with the functions of a bath.
- 7 On the architecture of the Circus Maximus, see Chapter 33.
- 8 Manciola 1987: 26, presumably reading from right to left, identifies the athletes as wrestlers, boxers, and runners. Stevenson, Smith, and Madden 1889: 203 identify them as wrestlers, jumpers, and boxers.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Newby 2005, especially pp. 21–87, provides an excellent starting point for the study of Greek sports in Rome. Her earlier article (2002),

a preliminary study to her book, is also useful. Benario 1983, Crowther 2004: 375–419, and Lee 2000 offer insights on various aspects of Greek sports in Rome. König 2005 is an important study of the portrayal of sport in Greek and Roman literature written during the Imperial period.

The outstanding work on the Capitoline Games is Caldelli's monograph (1993), which, however, is written in Italian, as is Colini's work on the stadium of Domitian (1943). Thuillier 1996, written in French, surveys all sports, including Greek, in ancient Rome, but his valuable work contains no footnotes (although the German version published in the same year does). Robert's excellent article (2010) on the Antoninia Pythia and the Agon Minervae, originally published in French in 1970, has now been translated into English. Mähl 1974 examines in German the views of Roman writers on Greek athletics. More abbreviated recent discussion can be found in Hallett 2005: 61–78, who emphasizes Roman hostility to Greek sports, and Newby 2005: 38–44, who, on the contrary, makes the case for degrees of acceptance.

Along with the idea that Romans were hostile to Greek athletics has been the opinion that Greek sports in the Roman period had undergone a decline and become decadent. Gardiner 1930, a work through which many have come to learn about Greek athletics, makes the classic statement of this position, alleging that professionalism had corrupted athletics as early as the fourth century BCE (1930: 46–52; cf. Gardiner 1910: 165–92). For counterarguments to Gardiner see Kyle 1990 and 1997. For an overview of sport in Classical antiquity without Gardiner's preconceptions of decline, see Kyle 2007.

PART III

People, Settings, Ideas

CHAPTER 37

Amphitheaters in the Roman World

Hazel Dodge

1 Introduction

From the earliest development of the Circus Maximus to the construction of imperial baths, Romans built a remarkable number of monumental public facilities for shows and relaxation, not just in the capital, but across the Empire. Much of the social life of Romans took place in public structures – amphitheaters, circuses, stadia, and theaters – erected to house sport and spectacle. These structures, and the events that took place within them, fostered a shared sense of community and pride, even among people of different groups and classes.

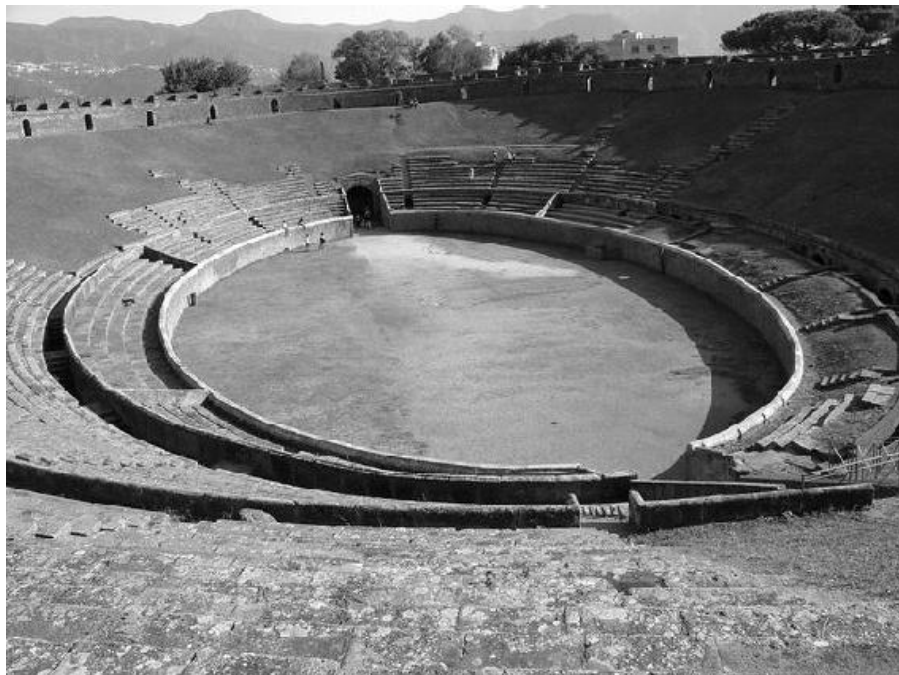
This essay will focus on what is perhaps the single most distinctively Roman form of architecture – the amphitheater; Chapter 38 in this volume examines other venues used for sport and spectacle.

The permanent amphitheater was usually elliptical in plan with an oval arena that was completely surrounded by seating (see [Figure 37.1](#)). The term “amphitheater” is derived from the Greek adjective *amphitheatros/-on*, meaning “surrounded by seats,” “seats on all sides.” Although other types of shows, such as beast hunts and aquatic displays, were also staged in amphitheaters, these structures were always most closely associated with gladiatorial games (Wilson Jones 1993; Golvin and Reddé 1990).

A particular challenge for the study of these buildings is the use of the word “amphitheater” by both modern and ancient writers. It is common in English usage to find the term applied very broadly to any venue for entertainment and spectacle irrespective of architectural form. This is not only misleading, but also can be incorrect. There are similar difficulties with the ancient sources. Starting in the late first

century BCE the specific Greek word *amphitheatron* was gradually applied to this type of building with an oval arena surrounded by seats (Coleman 2003: 66–7), but before then it had no standard designation. Even in later periods, inscriptions in the eastern Roman provinces sometimes refer to a simple theater using the Greek term *amphitheatron* (Robert 1940: 33 n. 6), presumably describing the nature of the seating. Unless there is surviving archaeological evidence associated with the inscription in question, the nature of the building referred to can be unclear.

Figure 37.1 The amphitheater at Pompeii, c.70 BCE. *Source:* Photograph by Roger B. Ulrich. Used with permission.



Amphitheaters, like any other class of Roman building, have to be examined against the broader canvas of the Roman world. Regional studies run the danger of missing the bigger picture, and it is misleading to fall back on an “East versus West” frame of reference. It is, moreover, important for scholars to include all the available evidence (epigraphic, artistic, documentary) in their interpretation and to be aware of the shortcomings of that evidence.

The sheer number of relevant sites makes it impossible within the bounds of this essay to provide detailed maps showing the precise location of each site. In the discussion that follows, most references to lesser-known ancient sites are followed, in parentheses, with the name of the modern-day country in which they are located. At the end of

this essay there is a list of all the ancient sites named in the text and the nearest modern-day settlement. Readers interested in precisely locating individual ancient sites are encouraged to make use of the list in conjunction with an Internet-based mapping program.

2 Origins of Amphitheaters and Their Early Development at Rome

The earliest gladiatorial shows (*munera*) in Rome were held in the first half of the third century BCE; the earliest permanent amphitheater in Rome was built in the middle of the first century BCE. (On *munera*, see Chapter 25.) Gladiatorial shows were initially staged in the political and symbolic heart of the city, the Forum Romanum (Vitruvius *On Architecture* 5.1). The Forum probably continued to be used as an arena into the early part of the Imperial period (31 BCE–476 CE), after which time other venues became available (Suetonius *Tiberius* 7.2) (see Map 25.1 for a plan showing the location of spectacle sites in Rome).

As *munera* grew in complexity and popularity, facilities, mostly temporary in nature, developed to accommodate spectators (Coleman 2000: 219–20). The design of the wooden seating erected for gladiatorial displays in the Forum may have provided a model for the ovoid plan of early permanent amphitheaters such as that at Pompeii (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 56–8; Welch 2007: 30–71). Julius Caesar, seeking to enhance the experience of those attending shows he was staging, apparently stretched awnings over the whole Forum on several occasions (Pliny *Natural History* 19.23).

In addition to the efforts made to accommodate the needs of spectators, the Forum received modifications to make it more suitable for *munera*. Excavations under the paving of the Forum have uncovered a central corridor with four lateral arms bisecting it at regular distances of 15 meters. Access up into the open piazza was provided by 12 shaft openings. Traces of installations in these galleries, which excavators dated to the mid-first century BCE, are reminiscent of the system of cages and pulleys for winching performers and animals up into the arena that would later be installed beneath the flooring in some amphitheaters (Carettoni 1956–8; Coleman 2000: 227–8).

Gladiatorial shows were also staged in a number of other sites in

Rome, particularly before the construction of the Colosseum in the first century CE. One of the more unusual of such sites was the extraordinary building put up by C. Scribonius Curio in 52 BCE for funeral games in honor of his father. Two theaters were constructed next to each other (back-to-back or side by side, it is unclear which), both attached to some kind of revolving pivot. In the morning separate dramatic performances took place. Then, at some point, the theaters were revolved to form one enclosed structure wherein Curio staged gladiatorial fights (Pliny *Natural History* 36.116–20). This was not only technically demanding but also dangerous (apparently some spectators remained in their seats) and provided a spectacle in its own right! Curio's rotating theaters may have been at least partly responsible for the elliptical form of later, permanent amphitheaters.

It was not until 29 BCE that Rome received its first permanent amphitheater, which was built by T. Statilius Taurus somewhere in the southern portion of the Campus Martius. It was financed by the *manubiae* (a general's share of the booty) he received after his successful campaigns in Africa (Dio Cassius 51.23.1; Suetonius *Augustus* 30.8; Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 52–3; *LTUR* I. 36–7). Little is known about this amphitheater except that it was small and built of stone and wood. Dio Cassius referred to it as a hunting theater (*theatron kunegetikon*), and it was probably never used as a fully public venue. It was destroyed in the fire of 64 CE.

Nero constructed a particularly sumptuous temporary wooden amphitheater in 57 CE on the Campus Martius. It was claimed he even held aquatic displays in this structure (Suetonius *Nero* 12; Tacitus *Annals* 13.31).

3 The Republican Amphitheater

There has been much discussion among modern scholars about the origins of both gladiatorial shows and the development and spread of the amphitheater as a building type in Italy (Futrell 1997: 9–29; Bomgardner 2000: 32–60; Welch 2007: 38–71). It has become clear that the amphitheater is a purely Italo-Campanian monument without Greek architectural antecedents.

The earliest permanent amphitheaters were constructed in Campania (the region south of Rome) at sites such as Capua, Cumae, Nola, and Puteoli. Very few of these can be dated more closely than the first century BCE, and only two roughly contemporary examples have been identified in Etruria (the region north of Rome), at the sites of Sutrium and Ferentium (Welch 2007: 192–251).

The earliest extant and closely datable amphitheater, that at Pompeii, was completed between 70 and 65 BCE (Figure 37.1). According to the dedicatory inscription, C. Quinctius Valgus and Marcus Porcius, chief magistrates (*duoviri*) of the new *colonia* ("colony") established at Pompeii in 80 BCE,¹ paid for the structure with their own money (*CIL* 10.852). Interestingly, the building is referred to as a *spectacula* in the inscription; this word was more usually used for the displays themselves, and its appearance in this inscription is an indication of the newness of the building type specifically designed as a site for spectacles. It was constructed on the eastern side of town just within the walls, and measures 135 by 105 meters externally. In common with other contemporary amphitheaters, it was not provided with the vaulted substructures characteristic of many later examples, and support for the seating was formed by upcast from digging down into the ground to create the sunken arena. At the exterior upper level ran a buttressed retaining wall of Roman concrete with a facing of *opus incertum* (small irregularly shaped blocks) (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 33–7; Welch 2007: 74–7; see Jacobelli 2003: figs. 44–52 for color illustrations).

A famous wall painting found in the peristyle garden of the House of Actius Anicetus at Pompeii provides a unique contemporary view of the amphitheater at Pompeii (Jacobelli 2003: 71–3 and fig. 58). The occasion depicted is a riot that took place in and around the Pompeii amphitheater in 59 CE between spectators from Pompeii and the neighboring town of Nuceria. This incident, one of the earliest examples of spectator violence in a sporting context, is mentioned by Tacitus (*Annals* 14.17). The resulting deaths apparently led to a 10-year ban on Pompeii holding gladiatorial shows. In the wall painting refreshment stands outside the amphitheater are very clear, such facilities being rather important given that the program of events could last the full day.

It is not by accident that most of the earliest amphitheaters appeared in towns in Italy that had particularly close ties with Rome, notably *coloniae* founded for army veterans (e.g., Paestum and Capua; see Welch 2007: 72–101). Such centers also provided the context for the earliest amphitheaters in the provinces, for example at Carmo (Spain), Corinth (Greece), and Antioch (Turkey) (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 41–2, 138; Welch 2007: 255–9; Dodge 2009).

Amphitheaters at Pompeii and elsewhere that were constructed toward the end of the Roman Republic (509–31 BCE) are characterized by a number of significant design features: a relatively simple architectural form, an elliptical arena surrounded by seating that maximized use of the surrounding topography for support, and the absence of arena substructures. Some of them were partially rock-

cut, as at Sutrium (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 40–1; Welch 2007: 246–8), and any built elements were provided in a mixture of stone and concrete with a facing of *opus incertum* or more often of *opus reticulatum* (small, square blocks laid in a diamond pattern); the latter is in some cases rather irregular, causing some scholars to use the ambiguous term *quasi-reticulatum* (see, for example, Coarelli 1977: 9–16).

The aforementioned fresco showing the amphitheater at Pompeii also supplies the clearest depiction of the awnings (*vela*, *velaria*) that provided shelter to the audience. These awnings are often mentioned in extant advertisements in Pompeii for gladiatorial games.² The provision of awnings at spectacles is also mentioned in a number of literary sources. Lucretius (4.71–84) describes the fluttering of yellow, red, and dark purple awnings “over a great theater” (possibly the Theater of Pompey), and Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 19.6.23–4) notes that awnings were stretched over the Forum in 78 BCE by means of some kind of cable system.

No corbels (supports that protrude from masonry) are preserved on the exterior of the Pompeii amphitheater today, but a number of other structures elsewhere in the Roman world have external corbels for masts that held the ropes for such awnings. In addition to the Colosseum in Rome, the Imperial period amphitheaters at the ancient sites of Pola (Croatia), Nemausus and Arelate (France), and the theaters at Arausio (France) and Aspendos (Turkey) have extensive surviving evidence for awnings. In the Colosseum these were operated by a detachment of sailors from the fleet at Misenum (Italy) (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae Commodus* 15.6; Montilla 1969; Scobie 1988: 222–3; Connolly and Dodge 1998: 199–200 with color illustrations).

Some scholars identify the stone bollards set into the pavement outside the façades of both the Colosseum and the Imperial period amphitheater at Capua as part of the winch system. However, if this was the case, they would have provided a major obstruction to spectators as they entered and exited the building. The bollards were most likely for some form of crowd control barriers, as seen in many modern sports venues (Connolly 2003: 63–5).

4 Construction and Location

The construction of an amphitheater was a demanding undertaking. The wraparound seating required both major substructures and multiple access points for spectators. There had to be secure areas where animals and gladiators could be lodged and assembled before

performances, and these had to be segregated from the auditorium. These needs were provided in different ways.

Advances in building technique in the last two centuries BCE meant that it was increasingly possible to provide vaulted supports for seating, as seen in the Colosseum. Similar arrangements are found in amphitheaters at ancient Nemausus and Arelate (France) and at Thysdrus (El-Djem, Tunisia).³ An available slope or hillside would be incorporated into the design wherever possible to economize on building materials, for example at Mediolanum Santonum (Saintes, France), where the structure was built into a narrow valley (Figure 37.2), and at Pergamon (Turkey), where the amphitheater straddled a steep-sided stream bed (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 124–6, 203). Even the Colosseum made use of the depression left by the drained lake of Nero's Golden House (Welch 2007: 130–4).

Figure 37.2 The amphitheater at Saintes, France (ancient Mediolanum Santonum), c.40 CE. *Source:* Myrabella. Used with permission.



The simpler, sunken construction of the amphitheater at Pompeii continued to be used, for example at Leptiminus (Tunisia) (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 132). Arena substructures were sometimes a secondary insertion, as at Augusta Treverorum (Germany), where dendrochronological analysis (tree-ring dating) suggests they were added to the late first-/early second-century CE amphitheater in the late third century CE (Kuhnén 2009: 98).

There are also a number of examples of wholly or partly rock-cut structures, for example Caralis (Sardinia), Italica (Spain), and Ptolemais in Cyrenaica (Libya). At Lepcis Magna (Libya) the amphitheater was built into an old quarry (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 83–4, 97, 200–2, 208).

Welch has demonstrated that the provision of amphitheaters in Italy and the western provinces in the Late Republican and Early Imperial periods can be linked to settlements of veterans or army training (Welch 2007: 88–91). With many of the early permanent amphitheaters, such as those at Pompeii and Sutrium, built in *coloniae* made up of veterans, they came to represent an important display of Rome's power and culture. In the Early Imperial period, amphitheaters are often found in association with *coloniae* or provincial capitals, for example Augusta Praetoria and Alba Fucens (Italy), Augusta Emerita (Spain), and Carthage (Tunisia) (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 82–3, 109–10, 122–3; Bomgardner 2000: 128–41).

The specific urban location of amphitheaters depended very much on local topography and when they were built. They took up a lot of space, and some are found on the fringes of or outside the main town site. At Pompeii and Augusta Praetoria (both in Italy) they were included within the fortified area, but at Luca and Verona (also both in Italy) the amphitheaters are outside the walls. Such a location would have facilitated the accommodation of performers in the displays, particularly of animals, with respect to which public safety must have been a critical issue.

Amphitheaters were also an important component of many military bases, especially legionary fortresses in frontier provinces such as Vetera (Germany) and Isca Augusta and Deva Victrix (Britain) (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 80, 88; Futrell 1997: 147–52). This pattern is repeated at Lambaesis (Algeria), and in the Danube region at sites such as Carnuntum (Austria), Aquincum (Hungary), Burnum (Croatia), and Porolissum (Romania) (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 148–56; Le Roux 1990; Sommer 2009).

Smaller military establishments were also sometimes provided with an amphitheater, for example Inveresk (Great Britain), Zugmantel⁴ (Germany), and Micia (Romania) (Sommer 2009). The poorly preserved amphitheater at Bostra, the provincial capital of Arabia, may also have served the military garrison of the *legio III Cyrenaica* (Mougdad (al-), Blanc, and Dentzer 1990). A small arena was built into a bath building at Dura-Europos (Syria) in the first half of the third century CE, when the northern half of that space was made into a military compound for the soldiers of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* and other legionary *vexillationes* stationed there (Rostovtzeff, Bellinger, Hopkins, *et al.* 1936: 72–7; Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 139; Dodge

5 The Colosseum and Amphitheaters in Imperial Italy

The most famous, and most influential, of all amphitheaters in the Roman world is the Flavian Amphitheater, better known today as the Colosseum in Rome (Gabucci 2001; Connolly 2003; Welch 2007: 128–62). Begun by Vespasian in 75 CE on the site of the lake of Nero's Golden House, it was dedicated in 80 CE by Titus after his father's death (Dio Cassius 66.25; Suetonius *Titus* 7.3).⁵

The surviving dedicatory inscription is particularly instructive (Alföldy 1995). Identified on a block reused in the early fifth century CE, it demonstrates that Titus had his name inserted so that he could claim the glory associated with the Colosseum's construction and that it was a victory monument, financed from the *manubiae* of Titus's sack of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Colosseum was a grand and monumental building of four storeys, standing on concrete foundations 12 meters deep, with a travertine façade rising to nearly 50 meters (Lancaster 2005). Fittingly, it is the largest of all Roman amphitheaters with outer dimensions of 188 by 156 meters; the arena proper measures 80 by 54 meters. Eighty main load-bearing travertine piers formed the framework of the vaulted substructures. At each level the arches of the façade were framed by engaged columns, the bottom storey being of the Doric order, the second Ionic, and the third Corinthian. The fourth storey, possibly completed by Domitian, was a plain wall with alternating windows and Corinthian pilasters. It is at this level that the corbels for awnings are preserved.

Figure 37.3 The interior of the Colosseum in Rome, c.75 CE. *Source:* Photograph by Kacan. Used with permission.



Beneath the now lost wooden floor of the arena is an elaborate system of subterranean passages and chambers where animals and gladiators were kept in readiness to be winched up to the arena level or let up along ramps (see [Figure 37.3](#)). There has been much debate about the nature, development, and date of these facilities, and it is difficult to disentangle the archaeological and architectural evidence to form a clear picture. Some scholars have suggested that the arena substructures were far less substantial at the time of the building's inauguration and that they were radically enlarged and remodeled under Domitian (Rea 1988; Coleman 2000: 233–5; Schingo 2000; Gabucci 2001: 148–59). Recent work has not only clarified the phases of the existing permanent structures but also revealed evidence for the first phase of the Colosseum arena (Beste 2000; Rea, Beste, Campagna, *et al.* 2000). This consisted of a removable wooden floor, which would presumably have facilitated the flooding of the arena for shows under Titus and Domitian as described by Suetonius (*Domitian* 4.1) and Dio Cassius (66.25.4). (The debate among scholars about whether the Colosseum arena was totally flooded for large aquatic displays during the building's inauguration is still to be fully resolved; for further discussion see my other essay in this volume, Chapter 38.)

The more substantial substructures that replaced these wooden facilities were much remodeled over the next few centuries (Rea 1988). Such substructures and their access points can be better appreciated in the amphitheaters at Capua and Puteoli (Golvin 1988:

vol. 1: 180–5, 204–5; Bomgardner 2000: 90–5 with pl. 3.12, 82–7 with fig. 3.5 and pls. 3.3, 3.8–11). In both these examples the arena floors of concrete are still in place and the openings for trap doors for hauling up animal cages can be clearly seen.

The design of the Colosseum also facilitated movement and accommodation of the audience. There were 76 public access points for the estimated forty-five to fifty-five thousand spectators, and the entrance a particular spectator used depended on where he or she was seated, just as in modern sports venues.

From the second century BCE onwards, seating arrangements may have been segregated by social class and gender in some public venues in Rome. The evidence for this practice, which was clearly intended to reify and reaffirm prevailing social hierarchies, has to be gleaned from disparate literary and epigraphic sources (Fagan 2011: 97–120). Members of the Senate sat separately for the first time at Roman games in 194 BCE (Livy 34.54). In 67 BCE the front 14 rows of seats were reserved by law for senators and equestrians (Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 2.19.3). This was renewed under Augustus (*lex Iulia theatralis*), when men and women were also segregated (Suetonius *Augustus* 44.1; Dio Cassius 53.25.1; Rawson 1987; Schnurr 1992). Augustus attempted to extend this to seating arrangements in the temporary wooden arenas constructed for gladiatorial display (Suetonius *Augustus* 44.2); he would not allow women to watch gladiators unless they sat at the very top of the seating, even though it had been customary in the past for men and women to sit alongside one another to watch such displays. Compliance with Augustus' regulations must have been less than total since his contemporary, Ovid (*Art of Love* 1.163–76), could still recommend shows in the Forum as a good opportunity for young men and women to meet.

When the Colosseum was constructed, seating arrangements were much more rigid. The audience was segregated, with a few specific exceptions, by social rank and gender. Segregation and reserved seating in the Colosseum is confirmed by the physical divisions in the seating areas and by inscriptions on the seats themselves (*CIL* 6.2059, 3207–22, 32099–151, 32152–250; Orlandi 2004: 167–521). Moreover, a vertical drop of 5 meters separated the upper two tiers from the rest, keeping noncitizens, women, and slaves well away from the rest of the audience. Interestingly, segregation by gender was not applied so rigidly in the Circus Maximus, although senators and equestrians were given seats in segregated areas. This may perhaps be explained by the very different proportional relationship between the length and width of the seating areas at these two sites.

Although there is a bias toward Rome in the ancient literature, accumulating evidence from the provinces suggests that there may

have been reserved areas of special seating for certain groups in some sites outside of Rome. However, there is not enough evidence to imply a widespread policy of strict segregation as in the auditoria of Rome. Moreover, although seating in the metropolis and in the provinces may have emphasized social order, it also allowed challenges in the form of rival sets of fans. At Lugdunum (France) members of the association of meat sellers would sit together in the amphitheater, and at Nemausus there were reserved blocks of seats for the boatmen (*nautae*) of the local rivers Rhône, Saône, Ardèche, and Ouzère (CIL 12.3316–18).

6 Amphitheatres in the Western Empire

Over 230 amphitheatres are known in the Roman world, and many of them can be found in Italy, Gaul, Germany, North Africa, and the Danube region, emphasizing the popularity of arena displays in these areas. The earliest examples of provincial amphitheatres from the Imperial period were constructed in colonies established in the later first century BCE, for example at Augusta Emerita (Spain) in 8 BCE (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 109–10; Durán Cabello 2004). At Lugdunum the amphitheater was constructed in 19 CE by Gaius Julius Rufus, chief priest of the Imperial Cult of the Three Gauls (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 117–18). Forming part of the large sanctuary of the cult, it added a Roman element to an already prominent pre-Roman focal point. At the beginning of the second century CE the amphitheater was considerably enlarged, increasing the estimated seating capacity from three thousand to twenty-seven thousand. The original dedicatory inscription is one of the earliest instances of the use of the term “amphitheater” to refer to the building type (Audin and Guey 1958; Wuilleumier 1963: 79 no. 217).

The earliest amphitheater in North Africa was constructed by the pro-Roman Mauretanian king Juba II (25 BCE–c.23 CE) at Iol Caesarea (Algeria). Its plan, an elongated oval, was perhaps a reflection of the development of the building type in the Forum Romanum in Rome (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 112–14; Bomgardner 2000: 151; Welch 2007: 47–65). It has been suggested that its shape was particularly suited for animal and hunting displays (*venationes*).

Many amphitheatres in the western part of the Roman Empire were constructed in the first and early second centuries CE. Examples of such amphitheatres in the western provinces have been found at the

ancient sites of Pola (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 171–3), Syracuse (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 115–16), Mediolanum Santonum (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 124–6), Nemausus and Arelate (Bomgardner 2000: 106–20; Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 184–90), and Tarraco (Dupré i Raventós 1994: 81–2; Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 164–5). One of the more notable amphitheaters in North Africa was built in 56 CE at Lepcis Magna (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 83–4; *CIL* 8.22672). The well-preserved building at Thysdrus, the largest amphitheater in North Africa, may not have been built until the first half of the third century CE (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 209–12; Bomgardner 2000: 146–51).

In Britain, at least 19 amphitheaters are known altogether, with a number associated with towns, for example, Calleva Atrebatum, Corinium Dobunorum, and Durnovaria (Silchester, Cirencester, and Dorchester, respectively). Most of these survive only as earthworks, but the amphitheater at London, discovered in 1988, was substantially rebuilt in the second century CE in stone (Bateman 2011).

A development particularly characteristic of central Gaul, Germany, and Britain is that of a hybrid form consisting of a combined amphitheater and theater. A variety of different terms have been used by scholars to refer to this type of arrangement. Golvin, for example, used four different labels: *edifice mixte*, *semi-amphithéâtre*, *théâtre-amphithéâtre*, and *théâtre mixte* (1988: vol. 1: 226–36). Perhaps a better term, that is more a reference to geographical distribution than an attempt at architectural description, might be “Gallo-Roman” (Sear 2006: 98–101). One of the best known of such structures is Les Arènes in Paris, which consists of an elliptical arena surrounded by standard amphitheater seating except on its west side, where it is flanked by a monumental stage (*scaena*) (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 225–36; Sear 2006: 237–8). Other examples occur at the modern-day towns of Lillebonne in France and St. Albans in Britain (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 226–8; Sear 2006: 233–4, 210–11, 197). Similar types of theater/amphitheater are also located at rural shrines in Gaul, for example at Sanxay and Gennes (southwest France). This is presumably a regional manifestation of the Greco-Roman connection between games and cult (Drinkwater 1983: 179–81; Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 226–36; Sear 2006: 204, 230–1).

This variation in building design may have developed for economic as well as pragmatic reasons. Dramatic performances were probably far less popular in these regions than elsewhere in the Empire, and epigraphic evidence suggests that animal displays may have been more common than gladiatorial combats. Thus, it made sense to construct one building that could serve more than one function. Another factor may have been a lower level of elite euergetism compared to other parts of the Roman world. The only example of this

type of hybrid theater/amphitheater outside the northwestern provinces is at Lixus (Morocco) (Sear 2006: 271; Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 230–6).

7 Amphitheaters in the Eastern Empire

The situation in the eastern part of the Roman Empire is much more complex. A wealth of epigraphic and iconographical material indicating the popularity of arena displays was published in the mid-twentieth century (Robert 1940), and there is also an array of literary evidence. Nevertheless, because only six purpose-built amphitheaters had been identified in the eastern Mediterranean up to the 1980s, the influential view developed that gladiatorial displays and thus their necessary venues were rare in the more “civilized” Greek East (Dodge 2009).

This view now appears to be problematic, in part because of the accrual of new evidence. As a result of research in the last two decades, over 20 purpose-built amphitheaters in the East can now be archaeologically identified. There are also Balkan examples at Marcianopolis, Philippopolis, and Serdica (Bulgaria) as well as Dyrrachium (Albania), with perhaps another dozen known from literary and other sources (Dodge 2009: 32–7; Velichkov 2009). Even more arenas were provided by the modification of other classes of entertainment buildings.

Compared to the western part of the Empire this is still a relatively small number of amphitheaters, particularly given the geographical size of the region, but a startling statistic is how few of these structures have been subjected to any form of archaeological investigation, let alone full excavation. Eleutheropolis (Israel) and Serdica are the only two fully excavated buildings (Kloner 1988; Velichkov 2009).

The earliest recorded instance of gladiatorial displays in the eastern Mediterranean was in a Hellenistic royal context when the Seleucid king Antiochos IV Epiphanes staged games at Daphne near Antioch in 166 BCE (Polybius 30.25–6; Livy 41.20.10–13; Bell 2004: 138–50). However, the earliest amphitheater was not constructed until the later first century BCE (at Antioch), apparently by Julius Caesar (John Malalas 216.21–217.4; Libanius *Orations* 2.219; Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 42). The simple form of this building, partly rock cut with no arena substructures, was probably similar to the

contemporary amphitheaters of Italy. Serdica is also the latest amphitheater known to have been constructed (late third/early fourth century CE, when the city became an imperial capital). Interestingly, it was built over an earlier theater.

None of the amphitheaters in the Roman East have the scale and monumentality of the structures at Nemausus, Augusta Emerita, or Thysdrus, except perhaps those at Kyzikos or Pergamon (Turkey), where the surviving remains of mortared rubble vaulted substructures give an idea of original scale. The more simple form of eastern amphitheaters means that fewer remains tend to survive and makes those remains difficult to identify. Recently, the existence of an amphitheater has been suggested at Palmyra (Syria) based on recently discovered air photographs taken in 1930 (Hammad 2008), although nothing is visible above ground.

A specific political and cultural context for the construction of eastern amphitheaters is known in very few cases (Dodge 2009: 37). Those associated with military establishments followed the pattern already identified in the West, but provision at eastern *coloniae* and provincial capitals is far less clear than in the West (Welch 2007: 72–127). Corinth and Gortyn (Greece), Paphos (Cyprus), and Bostra (Syria) were all provincial capitals with amphitheaters. On current evidence, Ephesos (Turkey), the provincial capital of Asia, did not possess an amphitheater, although it is the location of the only known gladiator cemetery, discovered in the 1990s (Kanz and Grossschmidt 2009). None have so far been identified in Egypt, although textual evidence implies their existence, for example at Alexandria (Dodge 2009: 37). For only one amphitheater in the eastern Mediterranean is there evidence that it was provided as an act of civic munificence. At Salamis in northern Cyprus, a prominent local citizen, Servius Sulpicius Pancles Veranianus, built or restored the amphitheater in the second half of the second century CE (Dodge 2009: 37).

Thus, many cities of the eastern Mediterranean were never provided with an amphitheater, but to judge from the epigraphic evidence, they hosted gladiatorial and other arena displays on a regular basis. The venues used were many and varied, including stadia and theaters, often modified in ways that were not confined to the eastern Mediterranean (see Chapter 38).

8 Conclusion

The quintessentially Roman amphitheater was, as a building type, relatively late in reaching its canonical form. Debates about the

origins of the amphitheater as a building type have long dominated scholarly work on the amphitheater, although recent research has gone a long way toward clarifying many other points (Futrell 1997; Welch 2007).

Partly as a result of senatorial opposition, permanent amphitheaters were not constructed in the city of Rome until the late first century BCE, despite the fact that they were being provided earlier for other cities in Italy. Literally hundreds of amphitheaters were ultimately constructed throughout the Roman Empire. The most northerly amphitheater occurs in a military context in Scotland, in association with the fort at Inveresk (Neighbour 2002); the most easterly examples have been identified at Palmyra in the Syrian desert and Dura-Europos on the Euphrates River (Hammad 2008). Most amphitheaters in the western provinces were constructed in the first to early third centuries CE, though it should be noted that not every city had one, nor were they always constructed on a monumental scale. In the East, a more complex situation prevailed that involved the limited provision of purpose-built amphitheaters and the much wider modification of preexisting entertainment venues.

Interestingly, the latest amphitheaters were constructed in the third and early fourth centuries CE, at a time when the gladiatorial games themselves were becoming far less frequent. As combat displays declined, arenas continued to provide a venue for the other types of shows with which they had long been associated – animal displays, acrobatics, and dancing. This continuity is evident in the early sixth-century CE writings of Cassiodorus and contemporary artistic portrayals of Constantinople (Cassiodorus *Variae* 5.42.6–10; Dodge 2009, 2011: 73–6).

List of key ancient sites mentioned in this essay, and corresponding modern sites

<i>Ancient site</i>	<i>Nearest modern settlement</i>	<i>Ancient site</i>	<i>Nearest modern settlement</i>
Alba Fucens	Avezzano, Italy	Lambaesis	Batna, Algeria
Antioch	Antakya, Turkey	Lepcis Magna	Khoms, Libya
Aquincum	Budapest, Hungary	Leptiminus	Lamta, Tunisia
Arausio	Orange, France	Lixus	Larache, Morocco
Arclare	Arles, France	Iuca	Lucca, Italy
Aspendos	Serik, Turkey	Lugdunum	Lyon, France
Augusta Emerita	Mérida, Spain	Marcianopolis	Devnya, Bulgaria
Augusta Treverorum	Trier, Germany	Mediolanum Santonum	Saintes, France
Aspendos	Serik, Turkey	Micia	Vejel, Romania
Bostra	Bostra, Syria	Misenum	Miseno, Italy
Burnum	Kistanje, Croatia	Nemausus	Nîmes, France
Calleva Atrebatum	Silchester, England	Nola	Nola, Italy
Caralis	Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy	Nuceria	Nocera Inferiore, Italy
Capua	Capua, Italy	Paestrum	Capaccio, Italy
Carinio	Carmona, Spain	Palmyra	Tadmor, Syria
Carnuntum	Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, Austria	Paphos	Paphos, Cyprus
Carthage	Tunis, Tunisia	Pergamon	Bergama, Turkey
Corinium	Cirencester, England	Philippopolis	Plovdiv, Bulgaria
Dobunnorum			
Corinth	Corinth, Greece	Pula	Pula, Croatia
Cumae	Cuma, Italy	Pompeii	Pompeii, Italy
Deva Victrix	Chester, England	Porolissum	Zalău, Romania
Dura-Europos	Salhiyé, Syria	Ptolemais	Tolmeitha, Libya
Durnovaria	Dorchester, England	Puteoli	Pozzuoli, Italy
Dyrrachium	Durres, Albania	Salamis	Famagusta, Cyprus
Eleutheropolis	Kiryat Gat, Israel	Serdica	Sofia, Bulgaria
Ephesos	Selçuk, Turkey	Sutrinum	Sutri, Italy
Ferentium	Viterbo, Italy	Syracuse	Siracusa, Italy
Gortyn	Gortyn, Greece	Tarraco	Tarragona, Spain
Iol Caesarea	Cherchell, Algeria	Thysdrus	El Djem, Tunisia
Isca Augusta	Caerleon, Wales	Verona	Verona, Italy
Italica	Santiponce, Spain	Vetera	Xanten, Germany
Kyzikos	Erdek, Turkey		

ABBREVIATIONS

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

LTUR = *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*

NOTES

1 Pompeii had a long history before it first came under Roman control in the late fourth or early third century BCE. When many places in Italy attempted an ultimately unsuccessful uprising against Roman power in the early first century BCE, the residents of Pompeii joined the uprising. As a result, the Roman government in 80 BCE settled a substantial number of Roman citizens in Pompeii

to help secure control over the site, and those settlers comprised what was known as a *colonia*. For good introductions to the site of Pompeii and its history, see Guzzo and D'Ambrosio 1998 or Ling 2005.

2 The Latin phraseology in the advertisements is *vela erunt*, “there will be awnings” (see *CIL* 4.3884, 1185 and Montilla 1969).

3 On these amphitheaters, see Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 184–90, 209–12. For illustrations of the relevant parts of the Colosseum, see Connolly and Dodge 1998: 190–8.

4 The Roman names of the military establishments at Inveresk and Zugmantel are not known.

5 On Nero’s Golden House, see Segala and Sciortino 1999.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

A good starting point for the further study of amphitheaters (and the spectacles held in amphitheaters) is Gabucci 2001, a lavishly illustrated work on the Colosseum. Hopkins and Beard 2005 is accessible and insightful on the structure of and seating in the Colosseum. Jacobelli 2003 is brief and focused on Pompeii but well illustrated, readable, and reliable on gladiatorial games.

On the emergence of amphitheaters as a building type in the Republic and on the Colosseum itself, Welch 2007 is now the essential source. Relevant inscriptions are collected in Orlandi 2004. On construction, materials, and elements of the Colosseum, see Connolly 2003 and Lancaster 2005. Recent studies on the wooden floor of the arena include Beste 2000 and Rea, Beste, Campagna, *et al.* 2000. On amphitheaters and urban settings in Rome, see Connolly and Dodge 1998, Coleman 2000 and 2003, and Coulston and Dodge 2000.

Older but still very useful reference works of broad scope include Golvin 1988; Conforto 1988; and Domergue, Landes, and Pailler 1990. Studies of facilities in different parts of the Empire from London to Bulgaria include Kloner 1988 on Beth Guvrin; Futrell 1997 on European sites and architectural adaptations; Bomgardner 2000 on imperial and North African sites; Kuhn 2009 on Trier; Nogales Basarrate 2002 on Spain; Dodge 2009 on the Roman East; Velichkov

2009 on Serdica; and Bateman 2011 on London.

On social historical issues (seating, crowds, performers, allure) see Rawson's classic 1987 essay; Schnurr 1992; and Fagan 2011. Also see Chapters 31, 34, and 35 in this volume.

Finally, Wilmott 2009 is a valuable recent collection of essays on Roman amphitheaters and spectacles, including Kanz and Grossschmidt 2009 on gladiator skeletons from Ephesos.

CHAPTER 38

Venues for Spectacle and Sport (other than Amphitheaters) in the Roman World

Hazel Dodge

1 Introduction

Amphitheaters are the entertainment venue we most associate with the Romans, but the range of other types of venue for spectator events across the Roman world was impressive. This chapter will examine three key spaces used for sport and spectacle in the Roman world: circuses, stadia, and artificial lakes. (Amphitheaters are discussed in Chapter 37.)

It is important to bear in mind that although each of these venues was closely associated with a specific kind of sport or spectacle they tended in fact to be multipurpose. This was often already true at the time of their construction, although they might also be modified at a later date if necessary. For example, the circus is normally thought of as a venue for chariot racing, but it also became a favored location for beast hunts (*venationes*), although these could also be staged in the amphitheater (Jennison 1937: 42–59; Dodge 2011: 47–62; see also Chapter 34). Both athletics displays and theatrical performances, which were presented as entertainment between chariot races, were also an important part of the activities that took place in circuses (Simpson 2000).

It is also necessary not to lose sight of the fact that over the centuries public areas and buildings other than those listed above housed sport and spectacle. For example, the Forum Romanum in Rome was the site of gladiatorial combats (Vitruvius *On Architecture* 5.1.2) and crocodiles were displayed in the Circus Flaminius in Rome

(Dio Cassius 55.10.8) (see [Map 25.1](#) for a plan of ancient Rome that shows the location of these sites). These spaces needed little modification and any additional facilities could be provided and then removed when no longer needed.

The sheer number of relevant sites makes it impossible within the bounds of this essay to provide detailed maps showing the precise location of each site. In the discussion that follows, most references to lesser-known ancient sites are followed, in parentheses, with the name of the modern-day country in which they are located. At the end of this essay is a list of all the ancient sites named in the text and the nearest modern-day settlement. Readers interested in precisely locating individual ancient sites are encouraged to make use of that list in conjunction with an Internet-based mapping program.

2 Circuses

The circus, particularly in its developed form, was largely a Roman invention. In the Greek world only minimal provision was made for chariot and horse racing. A flat area large enough for the racetrack (*hippodromos*) was all that was really necessary (Humphrey 1986: 5–11; Dodge 2008: 133–4). In spite of the fact that the Greek hippodrome and Roman circus differed markedly, the Greek term *hippodromos* (literally “horse track”), the equivalent to the Latin word *circus*, was often used by ancient writers and in inscriptions for circus structures in the eastern, Greek-speaking part of the Roman world. This practice is invariably followed in the modern literature (see Humphrey 1986: 5–12 for further discussion).

The circus was the largest of the various venues for sport and spectacle in the Roman world (Humphrey 1986: 1–4). The size of the circus was significant because of the purpose of the building: it had to be large enough to accommodate, at least in Rome, up to 12 chariots in a race. Thus, the length of the arena¹ at the Circus Maximus in Rome was approximately 580 meters with a width of about 79 meters (and an external length of between 600 and 620 meters) (Humphrey 1986: 124–6). The arenas in most western circuses are 400 to 450 meters long (for example, Augusta Emerita (Spain) and Lepcis Magna (Libya)). In the eastern provinces there is much greater variation in size, and the smallest example, with a length of 250 to 300 meters, is only slightly longer than the track in a standard stadium. There is good evidence to suggest that these shorter structures might have served as venues for both equestrian and athletics events (Humphrey 1986: 571–2; Weiss 1999; Dodge 2008).

Racetracks in circuses were divided down the middle by a central barrier and were separated from the audience by a high wall (see the reconstruction of the Circus Maximus in [Figure 25.1](#)). Modern-day discussions frequently state that Romans called the central barrier a *spina*, but in fact its standard designation in the Roman world was *euripus* (Humphrey 1986: 175–6). One of the reasons for this terminological confusion is that *euripus* initially referred to the channels dug around the perimeter of the arena in the Circus Maximus in 46 BCE in order to help protect spectators from animals during beast hunts. When those channels were filled in, the term *euripus* was transferred to the barrier running down the middle of the track. The wall separating the seating area from the arena, the *podium*, provided a safe vantage point for spectators.

Circuses were often designed so that the two long sides curved slightly outwards about halfway along. This made the events on the track more easily visible to spectators. It also gave extra space where the chariots most needed it: as they straightened up after having swept around the turning posts.² This feature can clearly be observed in many circuses, for example, at Augusta Emerita and Antioch (Turkey) (Dodge 2008: 137). It also appears in some stadia, beginning with the fourth-century BCE stadium at Nemea (Greece) (Miller 2001: 29–37; Welch 1998b: 548–50) and continuing through Roman-era stadia such as the one at Aphrodisias (Turkey).

The largest of all Roman circuses was the Circus Maximus in Rome, situated in the valley between the Palatine and Aventine Hills (*LTUR* 1.272–7; Humphrey 1986: 56–294). It was also the earliest to develop. For a long time the structure was fairly insubstantial, with seating either directly on the hill slopes or in the form of timber bleachers. There were no proper starting gates until 329 BCE (Livy 8.20.2); their original form and how they functioned is unknown.

In the early second century BCE the circus started to acquire more definite facilities. The *euripus* took on a more permanent form with turning posts at both ends each consisting of three adjacent markers; this very distinctive feature is depicted in circus mosaics of the Imperial period (31 BCE–476 CE) (Humphrey 1986: 208–46). In 174 BCE the first of two sets of lap counters was provided in the form of seven eggs (Livy 41.27.6).

Julius Caesar carried out some modifications to the Circus Maximus (Pliny *Natural History* 36.102; Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 39.2). He changed the lowest tier of seating from timber to stone and added the aforementioned channels, which separated the track from the seating (Humphrey 1986: 73–7).

In the closing decades of the first century BCE, the lap counting

mechanism was refurbished by Agrippa, who also provided a second lap counter in the form of dolphins. The installation of a second mechanism seems to have been motivated by mistakes that were being made in counting the laps (Dio Cassius 49.43.2). Although these lap counters often appear in Roman circus iconography, as well as in Hollywood films, it is still unclear exactly how they worked (Humphrey 1986: 260–5).

By the time of Augustus a number of statues and trophies had been erected on the *euripus* of the Circus Maximus, although the details of their appearance and relative locations are only supplied by literary and artistic evidence (Humphrey 1986: 174–294). Water basins also adorned the central barrier and were common to all circuses. It is clear that the Circus Maximus provided a major showcase for Roman culture and achievements. A good illustration of this is the red granite obelisk from Egypt erected by Augustus in 10 BCE in the Circus Maximus as a monument to celebrate his conquest of that country (Humphrey 1986: 269–72). The erection of this obelisk, which now stands in the Piazza del Popolo in Rome, initiated a practice of placing obelisks in circuses in various parts of the Roman world. Examples of Roman circuses with obelisks include the Vatican Circus and the Circus of Maxentius in Rome (Golvin 1990) as well as the circuses at Tyre (Lebanon), Caesarea Maritima (Israel), and Constantinople (Turkey) (Golvin 1990; Dodge 2008: 137).

Another significant innovation introduced by Augustus was the construction of an enclosed seating area, the *pulvinar*, along the northern side of circus, on the slopes of the Palatine Hill. The use of the *pulvinar* was reserved for those presiding over the games and is clearly depicted with a pedimented, hexastyle façade on a mosaic found at Luna in northern Italy (Humphrey 1986: 78–83).

During the reign of Trajan (98–117 CE) the Circus Maximus underwent a major transformation (Humphrey 1986: 100–15). The whole building was given a monumental aspect with increased seating and massive supporting substructures of brick-faced concrete at the curved southeast end. The exterior façade was reconstructed with arches, in the manner of the Colosseum and the Theater of Marcellus, as shown on a contemporary coin (Dodge 2011: 19). Modern estimates of seating capacity at the Circus Maximus vary from one hundred and fifty thousand to three hundred and fifty thousand, with the latter quite credible for the Trajanic building (*LTUR* 1.272–7).

As a result of their vast size, few circuses have been completely excavated. One of the best-preserved and most thoroughly investigated is at Lepcis Magna (Humphrey 1986: 25–55). This circus, which was built in the second century CE, lay east of the city, next to the shoreline. To the south was an amphitheater built in 56 CE, and

when the circus was completed the two were connected by open passages and tunnels carved through the hillside (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 83–4). The unification of these two classes of entertainment building in a single architectural complex is unparalleled elsewhere in the Roman world. The arena of the circus was almost exactly 450 meters in length, making it one of the longest after the Circus Maximus.

In common with other Roman circuses, the starting gates at Lepcis Magna were placed along a shallow arc so that all the chariots had the same distance to travel to the narrowed gap to the right of the near turning post. Gaining a good position in this initial gallop was often crucial to the outcome of the race. The uniquely fine preservation of the starting gates at Lepcis Magna allows a reconstruction of the opening mechanism by means of which the races were started (Humphrey 1986: 157–68). An attendant pulled a lever that activated a catapult mechanism, which in turn jerked out the latches of the gates of each stall and allowed the gates to fly open all at once. Presumably a similar arrangement was found in other circuses, including the Circus Maximus. At the end of the seventh lap, instead of returning down the track to the starting gates the teams would round the turning point and head up to the finish line roughly two-thirds along one side. (On the details of Roman chariot races, see Chapter 33.)

Compared to amphitheaters and theaters, circuses were relatively rare in the Roman world. They were generally provided at a later date (second century CE onwards) and marked a city out from others as a center of power. The remodeled Circus Maximus often provided the design inspiration.

There are only three securely attested circuses in the Gallic provinces: at modern-day Arles in the south of France, at Vienne just south of Lyon, and at Trier in the Moselle valley of Germany (Humphrey 1986: 388–411).³ The existence of other circuses has been suggested, notably at Lyon, although no physical evidence has yet been recovered (Humphrey 1986: 409–37).

Chariot racing was particularly popular in the Iberian peninsula, and the remains of over a dozen circuses are known (Humphrey 1986: 337–87; Basarrate and Sánchez-Palencia 2001). Two particularly well-preserved examples are at Augusta Emerita in the southwest and at Tarraco in the northeast (Humphrey 1986: 362–76 and 339–44; Basarrate and Sánchez-Palencia 2001: 75–95, 141–54). Both date to the second century CE, but they differ in terms of location. The circus at Augusta Emerita lies outside the city walls whereas at Tarraco the circus was built on a terrace within the urban center and in association with the Temple of the Imperial Cult. Recent work has identified much of the seating area's substructure, which is preserved

in the lower storeys of later buildings. The position of this circus emphasizes the important ideological connection between Roman spectacle and the imperial cult. Further, both these cities were provincial capitals, a conjunction that can also be observed at Carthage (Tunisia), Antioch (Turkey), and Bostra (Syria).

In 2004 the first circus to be identified in Britain was found at Colchester, which was the Roman colony of Camulodunum and an early provincial center for the imperial cult (Crummy 2008a, 2008b). The circus was situated outside the walled town to the south and dates to the mid-second century CE. Nothing now survives above ground. Its overall length of 447 meters has been established by excavation.

In the eastern Mediterranean, where both chariot and horse racing were already well-established before the Roman period, monumental circuses do not appear as uniformly as in the West, either in location or design (Humphrey 1986: 438–539; Dodge 2008). Based on literary, epigraphic, and iconographic evidence, a number of eastern cities staged chariot racing at one period or another (Humphrey 1986: fig. 205), but fewer cities are known to have possessed a monumental circus. The cities that did tended to be major Roman cultural and administrative centers, such as Antioch and Tyre. Interestingly, there are only two attested monumental circuses in Greece: one recently excavated at Corinth (Romano 2005) and the late third-century CE circus at Thessaloniki. In Asia Minor (modern Turkey) there are only three: Nicomedia, Anazarbus, and Antioch, and nearby there is the example at Constantinople probably constructed when Septimius Severus refounded Byzantion (Humphrey 1986: 438–61; Dodge 2008; see Chapter 43). In Egypt two circuses have been physically identified, one being at Alexandria and the other being the magnificently preserved (under the sand!) example at Antinoupolis; several others are known from documentary sources (Humphrey 1986: 505–16).

There were essentially two types of circus structure built in the eastern Mediterranean (Dodge 2008), and they present a number of interpretational problems. The larger form of building (found, for example, at Tyre, Antioch, and Bostra) had close similarities with circuses built in the West in terms of overall proportions and dimensions (about 400 to 450 meters in length). The smaller type, with examples at Gerasa (Jordan), Corinth (Greece), and Caesarea Maritima (Israel) (all three excavated and published in the last two decades), were much shorter at about 300 meters (Dodge 2008; Ostrasz 1991, 1995; Romano 2005; Weiss 1999). (The circus at Caesarea Maritima is illustrated in [Figure 38.1.4](#)) They all had starting gates, although the number varied, and they all had some kind of central barrier, both features being absolute necessities for a Roman-style circus (Humphrey 1986: 18–24). This variation in size, along

with the evidence from recent excavations, suggests that circuses in the East were more multifunctional than in the West. Literary evidence for Caesarea shows that athletics and possibly gladiatorial displays were accommodated, as well as chariot and horse racing, and animal displays (Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 16.136–8, *Jewish Wars* 1.415; Weiss 1996, 1999).

Figure 38.1 The circus at Caesarea Maritima in modern-day Israel, c.20 BCE. *Source:* Photograph by Odemars. Used with permission.



On occasion in ancient literature these smaller circuses are referred to as “amphitheaters” (Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 15.341). This has caused considerable debate among modern scholars about the terminology that should be used to describe these structures. Two suggestions are “amphitheatrical-hippo-stadia” and “multi-functional audience buildings/structures” (Humphrey 1996; Dodge 2008). However, even with these new terms, which are in practice not terribly helpful, there is a great detail of inexactitude in their use. They further emphasize the need to rethink modern scholarly approaches to Roman spectacle venues in general. The multifunctional nature of the physical form that can be observed in the complex at Caesarea is paralleled by a number of other structures in the eastern provinces, notably the stadium at Aphrodisias and the theater at Stobi.

The association between circus spectacle on the one hand and politics and the emperor on the other is particularly evident in the juxtaposition of the circus and the imperial palace. That juxtaposition appeared first at Rome with the Palatine palace and the Circus Maximus and was emulated in the Tetrarchic capitals in Milan, Thessaloniki, and Sirmium (Serbia), as well as the Circus of Maxentius on the Via Appia just outside Rome.

3 Stadia

The stadium, a Greek building type designed to accommodate footraces and other athletic activities, was well established by the end of the fourth century BCE. By the Roman period it was usually rectangular with one curved end and had an average length of 180 to 200 meters. (On Greek stadia, see Chapter 18.)

It is clear from iconographic and literary evidence from across the Roman world that toward the end of the period of the Roman Republic (509–31 BCE) athletic activity came to occupy an increasingly prominent place in Roman society. In the past, modern scholarship has been quick to follow the traditional line, mainly based on Roman literary sources, that athletic activity of the kind long popular in the Greek world never found favor in Rome and the western provinces. However, recent work on literary, iconographic, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence has shown that this standpoint requires considerable adjustment (Newby 2005; König 2005). Even so, in the West the only identifiable purpose-built athletics venues were in Italy, specifically at Rome, Naples and Puteoli (Aupert 1990; Newby 2005: 36). There is epigraphic and artistic evidence attesting athletic festivals at the modern-day cities of Nîmes, Marseilles, and Vienne in the south of France, as well as at Gafsa in Tunisia, although no specific structures have been identified. Athletics also found another home in the context of Roman public baths and private villas (Newby 2005: 45–140).

Greek-style athletic contests were held at Rome long before permanent facilities were built to accommodate them. The first recorded display of Greek athletics in Rome took place in 186 BCE when Marcus Fulvius Nobilior staged a lavish set of games as part of his triumphal celebrations. This was also the first time a beast hunt (*venatio*) was presented in Rome. Both displays presumably took place in the circus as entertainment between races (Livy 39.22.1–2; Crowther 2004: 381–5; Newby 2005: 25–6). Athletic contests, particularly boxing and wrestling, could just as easily be accommodated in a temporary structure, either a theater or a stadium. Both Julius Caesar and Augustus constructed temporary wooden stadia on the Campus Martius (Sear 2006: 54–7). Caesar constructed his building for the athletic contests associated with his quadruple triumph in 46 BCE (Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 39.3). Augustus made similar provision in 28 BCE as part of his Actium victory celebrations (Dio Cassius 53.1.5). Nero may also have constructed a temporary stadium for his short-lived Greek-style games, the Neroneia (Coleman 2000: 241; Newby 2005: 28–31). (For more detailed discussion of the history of Greek sport in Rome, see Chapter 36.)

Domitian built Rome's first permanent stadium in the Campus Martius in 86 CE. This stadium housed the Greek-style contests, the

Capitoline Games, that Domitian established in honor of Jupiter (Suetonius *Domitian* 4.3; Newby 2005: 31–7). The foundations and outline of the stadium have been preserved by the modern Piazza Navona. It was the first stadium to be raised on vaults instead of being banked on earth; this development was presumably inspired by the theaters and amphitheater of contemporary Rome. Its external length of 275 meters makes it one of the largest stadia known from antiquity. Its track length was approximately 192 meters long and hence conformed to Greek practice.⁵

The two other stadia known in the West were both located in southern Italy on the Bay of Naples. A stadium was built at Naples for the Sebasta festival, a set of Greek games founded in 2 BCE to honor Augustus (Crowther 2004: 93–8). Antoninus Pius established a set of Olympic-style games at Puteoli in c.142 CE in honor of his adoptive father Hadrian (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 10.515; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae Hadrian* 27.3). The associated stadium was substantial at over 330 meters in length (Humphrey 1986: 571–2). Recently work has been carried out on the building but very little has yet been published.

In the eastern provinces many major cities had a monumental stadium, some already provided before the Roman period, for example at Messene and Athens in Greece, although the latter was rebuilt in the mid-second century CE (Aupert 1990: 99–101). In Asia Minor and further east most of the stadia were Roman-period constructions, although their modern study is hampered by a lack of systematic excavation. The (presumably) second-century CE building at Perge in southern Turkey is one of the best-preserved stadia of antiquity. The traditional hairpin-shaped structure is 234 meters long and 34 meters wide. Twelve rows of well-preserved seats were supported on inclined barrel vaults and provided accommodation for some twelve thousand spectators. The entrance to the performance area lay at the southern end, but only a few fragments survive of the monumental gateway marking this entrance. Spectators entered through every third vault, while doors between the vaults allowed access from one vault to another. The vaulted spaces supporting the seating were used as storerooms, workrooms, and shops, especially during the festivals held in honor of Artemis (Abbasoğlu 2001; Dodge 2010: 266–7; Grainger 2009: 94–97, 103–8, 173–5, 196–7, 209–10 and fig. 20; Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 245). Other Roman stadia are preserved at Ephesos and Aspendos (Turkey), and Kourion on Cyprus.

At Aphrodisias there is a particularly interesting and well-preserved stadium that dates to the later first century CE (see [Figure 38.2](#)). Unusually, it terminates at both ends in a curve, thus enclosing the whole track with seating. Built entirely of stone, it is 262 meters

long and 59 meters wide at its broadest point; it is thus slightly larger than a traditional stadium. Its 30 tiers of seats could have accommodated approximately thirty thousand spectators. As in circuses, the long sides were not parallel but bulge out slightly at their center to allow for better spectator viewing. The epigraphic record from Aphrodisias is vast and there is plenty of evidence for athletics contests, but that evidence also indicates that the stadium was used for more Roman types of spectacle such as beast hunts (Roueché 1993: 61–80 and nos. 14–15, 40–1, 44). A podium wall, 1.60 meters high, that surrounded the performance area was part of the original design and had holes cut into the stonework for timber uprights to support nets (Welch 1998b: 558–9; Dodge 2008: 140–2). These features were useful primarily during beast hunts. The fact that they were provided at the time of construction shows that the building was intended to be multifunctional from the outset. This is not an isolated example. Similar provision was also made in the mid-second century CE in Herodes Atticus's rebuilding of the stadium in Athens (Welch 1999: 127–32).

Figure 38.2 The stadium at Aphrodisias in modern-day Turkey, late first century CE. *Source:* Photograph by D. Enrico di Palma. Used with permission.



The presence of a wooden post and net system to protect distinguished spectators has long been reconstructed for the

Colosseum (Gabucci 2001: 127–8; Connolly 2003: 196–8), but definitive evidence and reconstruction of such an arrangement was first properly explored following excavation of the second-century CE theater at Stobi in Macedonia (Gebhard 1975). This structure was built from the outset to function as both a theater and an amphitheater. Evidence for such arrangements has also been recorded in the modifications to a number of theaters in Greece and Asia Minor. Our knowledge of the details of these post and net systems is enriched by a description given by the mid-first century CE poet Calpurnius Siculus of an arrangement used in Nero's temporary amphitheater on the Campus Martius in Rome. A fence with netting surrounded the arena and was topped by some kind of device with horizontally mounted metal rollers that, by turning, prevented animals from gaining purchase and thus being able to jump over (*Eclogues* 7.50–6; Scobie 1998: 211–12). The rather comedic effect would no doubt have appealed to a Roman audience while frustrating and angering the animals.

Two other stadia are similar to Aphrodisias and further demonstrate the generally varied nature of the provision of entertainment buildings in the East. The stadium at Laodicea ad Lycum in western Turkey, erected in 79 CE in honor of the emperor Vespasian, has the same plan as at Aphrodisias. A length of nearly 350 meters makes it twice the usual dimension for a stadium (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 243; Humphrey 1996: 123). Surviving dedicatory inscriptions refer to the building as a *stadion amphitheatron leukolithon*, literally an “amphitheatral (i.e., surrounded by seating) stadium of white stone” (*Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes* 4.845, 861). The epigraphic evidence attests to the building's use for both athletic and gladiatorial contests (Robert 1940: nos. 116–20). The stadium at Nikopolis in northwestern Greece has a very similar plan, although it is shorter. It was almost certainly constructed for the Actia, the victory games instituted there by Augustus after the Battle of Actium (see Chapter 36).

Another stadium worthy of detailed comment is that at Aezani in northwestern Turkey. It was probably built in the second century CE and is placed with its open end, where the starting line would be situated, up against the exterior of the stage-building of the theater. The seating is supported on earth banks. A similar arrangement can be found elsewhere in Asia Minor at Sardis (Vann 1989: 59–65) and presumably added flexibility and variety to both venue and type of show. Further modifications of stadia in Late Antiquity are discussed below.

4 Artificial Lakes

Starting in the first century BCE aquatic spectacles of various kinds were held in a number of places in the Roman world. Augustus, for example, in 2 BCE staged an elaborate set of games during which he had the Circus Flaminius in Rome flooded. Thirty-six crocodiles were then released into the pool created, which were subsequently hunted down and killed (Dio Cassius 55.10.8).

The most elaborate aquatic spectacles took the form of naval combats staged at sites in and around Rome. Aquatic spectacles in Rome were most often accommodated in a large artificial basin, a *naumachia* or *stagnum*. The former term came to be used for the spectacles themselves, particularly sea battle reenactments (Coleman 1993: 50).

The first recorded aquatic spectacle in Rome was staged by Julius Caesar in a specially built basin in the Campus Martius in 46 BCE (Suetonius *Caesar* 39.4). The basin was filled in after the event (Dio Cassius 45.17.8) and nothing now survives to give any indication of size and scale. However, to judge from the numbers of ships and men involved, it was constructed on a very large scale. The battle was fought between two fleets that represented Tyre and Egypt and included a variety of ships with two, three, and four banks of oars manned by some four thousand rowers and two thousand combatants (Appian *The Civil Wars* 2.102; Coleman 1993: 49–50, *LTUR* 3.38).

Augustus, as part of the games he staged in 2 BCE, held a naval battle in a huge artificial lake that he had built on the right bank of the Tiber River (*LTUR* 3.337; Taylor 2000: 174–90; Coleman 1993: 50–5). The brief autobiographical statement that formed part of Augustus's will claims that this lake, referred to in the ancient sources as a *stagnum*, measured a colossal 1,800 by 1,200 Roman feet (536 by 357 meters, *Res Gestae* 23). Literary descriptions indicate that it had an island incorporated into its design, but the overall shape of the pool is unknown. It may have been planned as an ellipse, giving maximum all-round visibility for the spectators, but close examination of the orientation of modern buildings in the area has suggested that it had a more rectangular shape (Dodge 2011: 64–5). Augustus's *stagnum* was fed by a new and largely subterranean aqueduct, the *Aqua Alsietina* (Frontinus *Aqueducts* 11.22). An estimated 270,000 cubic meters of water was necessary to fill the basin. The water inside must have been at least 1.7 meters deep to allow for the use of oars as well as realistic drowning. Augustus states that 30 large and many smaller vessels, which were brought into the basin from the Tiber via a canal, manned by three thousand marines and an unspecified number of

rowers took part in the battle. Dio Cassius (55.10.7) and Ovid (*Art of Love* 1.171–2) inform us that the opposing fleets played the parts of Persians and Athenians, who had fought a number of famous naval battles in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. The combatants were probably but not certainly condemned criminals who fought to the death (Coleman 1993: 67; Dunkle 2008: 193; but cf. Wiedemann 1992: 90).

Augustus's *stagnum* remained in at least intermittent use for a considerable period of time. It was the site of some of the larger shows staged in conjunction with the inauguration of the Colosseum in 80 CE (Suetonius *Titus* 7.3) and it may have been the place where Philip the Arab held a *naumachia* in 247 CE (Aurelius Victor *Caesars* 28). It had been filled in before the end of the third century CE when a new fortification wall was built over the top of it (Coleman 1993: 54).

Trajan (ruled 98–117 CE) constructed a *stagnum* in the area to the northwest of Castel Sant'Angelo (Prati di Castello) in the vicinity of the significantly named eighth-century CE church, S. Pellegrino in Naumachia (*LTUR* 3.338; Taylor 2000: 245–7). This site is mentioned in an inscription dated to 109 CE (*Inscriptiones Italiae* 12.1.5 pp. 200–1), along with a sea battle. Little is known of its form; however, it was probably a rectangular structure, smaller than Augustus's *stagnum* but with a minimum capacity of 44,400 cubic meters.

Two *naumachiae* merit special attention. The first is that held by the emperor Claudius on the Fucine Lake, located about 50 miles east of Rome, in 52 CE (Dunkle 2008: 194–6). This was the largest known *naumachia* and involved nineteen thousand condemned criminals manning full-scale naval vessels, triremes and quadriremes (Tacitus *Annals* 12.56). The participants were divided into two fleets, representing the “Sicilians” and “Rhodians.” The Praetorian Guard took part in the battle by manning rafts equipped with catapults and ballistae. The condemned criminals saluted Claudius with the words “Ave imperator, morituri te salutant” (“Hail emperor, those who are about to die salute you!”) (Suetonius *Claudius* 21.6; Dio Cassius 60.33.3–4). It is a common – but erroneous – assumption that these words were regularly spoken by gladiators prior to combats in the arena. This salute was unique to this occasion and seems to have been an appeal for mercy.

Another particularly noteworthy occasion came in 80 CE when Titus celebrated the opening of the Colosseum with an elaborate series of shows that included aquatic spectacles. A key question involving the aquatic spectacles staged by Titus is whether they involved flooding the Colosseum. A series of epigrams written by Martial (*Spectacles* 27–30, 34; Coleman 2006: 195–217, 249–59) to commemorate the occasion shows that Titus's games included more

than one *naumachia*, a reenactment of the myth of Leander swimming across the Hellespont to see his beloved Hero, a pantomime involving the sea goddesses called the Nereids, and a chariot race on a partially submerged track. Martial places some of these events in Augustus's *stagnum*, but he describes one of the *naumachiae* as taking place in a venue that could be quickly filled and drained. This description seems to rule out Augustus's *stagnum*, which would have required days to fill. In his description of Titus's games, Dio Cassius mentions two *naumachiae*, one held in Augustus's *stagnum* and another held in the Colosseum (66.25.2–4).

The evidence provided by Martial and other authors about the siting of Titus's aquatic spectacles can be supplemented from other sources. Dio Cassius (61.9.5, 62.15.1) claims that Nero on two separate occasions staged a *naumachia* in Rome in a *theatron*⁶ that was immediately afterward drained and used as a site for a staged land battle or gladiatorial combat. Amphitheaters from elsewhere in the Roman world were equipped with basins in their arenas. Finally, Suetonius (*Domitian* 4.1) states clearly that Titus's brother and successor, Domitian, flooded the Colosseum for a *naumachia*.

These sources have created heated debate among scholars about whether or not the Flavian amphitheater really was capable of supporting large-scale water spectacles at the time of its inauguration (Coleman 1993: 58–60; 2000: 234–5; 2006: 195–9; Gabucci 2001: 148–59; Connolly 2003: 139–61, 185–206). Despite recent architectural and archaeological work on the substructures beneath the arena, there is still no consensus on the subject. This area of the building was much remodeled by Domitian and later emperors. It is true that it is lined with waterproof mortar (*opus signinum*) and that there are drains that would allow the evacuation of water in some quantity (Gabucci 2001: 234–40). There is, however, no trace of a system capable of providing the necessary volume of water to flood the arena. Equally, there have been no adequate estimates of the amount of time it might have taken to both fill and empty the arena. The displays referred to by Martial could possibly have been accommodated in a smaller temporary pool or basin involving far less water.

Large and elaborate aquatic spectacles were staged chiefly in Rome; they were held far less frequently and on a much smaller scale elsewhere in the Roman world. The amphitheaters at Verona (Italy) and Augusta Emerita (Spain), in the form they took in the late first century BCE and early first century CE, had shallow, almost cross-shaped basins beneath the arena floors (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 109–10, 169–71; Golvin and Reddé 1990; Coleman 1993: 57). These basins were fed by aqueducts and provided with drainage channels. The

shallow depth of these basins (approximately 1.25 meters) and the presence of an aqueduct water supply suggests that they may have been used for aquatic displays. The floorboards could presumably have been removed for such an event and replaced for the rest of the program. Naturally, any aquatic display performed in such a restricted basin would have been a very modest affair. Perhaps these structures were used for spectacles of a nonviolent nature, such as some of those described by Martial during the inauguration of the Colosseum.

Aquatic spectacles may not have been very common in the provinces but there is good archaeological evidence from Late Antiquity for a number of theaters, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean, being modified to allow the orchestra to be flooded. Examples include theaters at Corinth and Argos in Greece (Traversari 1960). The theater at Argos was originally built in the fourth century BCE. In the Early Roman period the seating area was extended on both flanks and the circular orchestra was bisected by the addition of a Roman style masonry stage-building. At a later date still, probably in the later fourth century CE, a high wall was placed around the orchestra and an aqueduct was provided to flood the arena. In the theater at Paphos (Cyprus) a wall at the base of the seating area was constructed in the later third century CE so that the orchestra could be flooded (Green and Stennett 2002). The theater had already been modified with facilities for beast hunts and gladiatorial games. At Ostia (Italy) the theater associated with the Piazzale delle Corporazione was converted in the fourth century CE to accommodate aquatic displays, with water tanks placed beneath the seating (Dodge 2010: 258; 2011: 76–7).

5 Adapted and Modified Venues

Venues for Roman spectacle and entertainment often accommodated more than one type of display and were provided with the necessary facilities to do so as part of their original design. However, buildings could also be modified and adapted at a date well after their construction. This happened particularly in the eastern provinces, where amphitheaters were not so common and other buildings, especially theaters (both pre-Roman and Roman), were altered to accommodate gladiatorial combats and beast hunts (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 237–49; Moretti 1992; Dodge 2009: 38–41). The remodeling varied from the addition of a wall, usually just over a meter high, around the orchestra, for example in the South Theater at Gerasa (Jordan) (see [Figure 38.3](#)) and the theater at Bostra (Syria) (Golvin 1988: vol. 1:

246), to something much more substantial involving the removal of the lowest rows of seats to create a much higher podium wall and an arena. Notable examples of the latter type of remodeling can be seen at Ephesos, Xanthos, and Side in Turkey (Sear 2006: 334–6, 377, 380; Dodge 2009: 40). When the theater at Corinth was remodeled in this way the resulting arena was some 13 meters in diameter and the podium wall was painted with scenes of animal displays (Sear 2006: 392–3; Dodge 2009: 38).

A particularly clear example of this type of modification can be seen at Cyrene (Libya). The magnificently sited Greek theater at the west end of the sanctuary of Apollo was converted sometime in the second century CE by the elimination of the stage and the deepening of the small orchestra to form the arena of a small amphitheater. The seating on the north, seaward side was carried on arches. The arena was carved into solid rock and a tunnel had to be cut to allow the movement of animal cages around the arena (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 96–7; Sear 2006: 291–2).

In addition to theaters, the stadia and the shorter circuses in the eastern provinces could also be adapted for arena games. This usually took the form of the insertion of a curved wall into one end, creating an elliptical enclosed performance area. There are many examples: the stadia at Athens, Perge, and Aphrodisias and the circuses at Gerasa and Caesarea Maritima (Golvin 1988: vol. 1: 237–49; Weiss 1999: 34–5; Sear 2006: 43–5; Dodge 2009: 41). The dating of this feature is problematic, often merely stated as “late” in publications. What is particularly noteworthy is that scholars have usually assumed that such modifications indicate a rise in the popularity of gladiatorial games, whereas other evidence suggests that the high point of *munera* in the East was in the second and third centuries CE. The correct conclusion may be that they were intended primarily for beast hunts (Dodge 2009: 41–2).

Figure 38.3 The South Theater at Gerasa in modern-day Jordan, originally constructed in late first century CE. *Source:* Photograph by Diego Delso. Used with permission.



6 Conclusion: Spectacle and Structures

Sport and spectacle found many roles and venues in the Roman world, but the distribution of the different building types does not necessarily reflect the popularity or presence/absence of a particular spectacle type. This is especially clear in the case of gladiators and amphitheaters. Structures built for sport and spectacle were multifunctional, often coming to accommodate a range of displays. A further challenge is the lack of consistency and exactitude in the ancient terminology used in the written evidence. The importance of entertainment and leisure in the Roman world can be judged by the plethora of theaters, amphitheaters, and bath buildings that survive across the Empire. Huge amounts of money were poured into providing the cities of the Empire with fitting venues for a range of entertainments and they developed a sociopolitical importance that resonates down the ages. The finance for these projects came from a variety of sources, but from the Late Republic donating such facilities was identified as an appropriate mode of self-advancement by prominent figures.

Moreover, some forms of sport and spectacle were accommodated in other spaces. In the Greek world physical exercise regularly took place in *gymnasia* (see Chapter 19). In the Roman world the bathing

process achieved greater social importance, but exercise was also an integral part. This is not only reflected in the provision of exercise spaces within bath buildings, but also in the decoration. The Baths of Caracalla in Rome incorporated large mosaics depicting athletes. The changing room in the Porta Marina Baths at Ostia features a particularly striking black and white mosaic depicting athletes weightlifting, wrestling, and boxing, evoking the exercises in which the bathers took part. Similar images were painted on the walls of a latrine in a bath complex at Vienne (France) (Newby 2005: 78–82).

List of key ancient sites mentioned in this essay, and corresponding modern sites

<i>Ancient site</i>	<i>Nearest modern settlement</i>	<i>Ancient site</i>	<i>Nearest modern settlement</i>
Aezani	Çavdarhisar, Turkey	Lepcis Magna	Khoms, Libya
Alexandria	Alexandria, Egypt	Luni	Luni, Italy
Anazarbus	Adana, Turkey	Messene	Messene, Greece
Antinoopolis	El Ashmuncin, Egypt	Naples	Naples, Italy
Antioch	Antakya, Turkey	Nemea	Nemea, Greece
Aphrodisias	Geyre, Turkey	Nicomedia	Izmit, Turkey
Argos	Argos, Greece	Nikopolis	Preveza, Greece
Aspendos	Serik, Turkey	Ostia	Ostia, Italy
Augusta	Mérida, Spain	Paphos	Paphos, Cyprus
Emerita			
Bosra	Bosra, Syria	Perge	Antalya, Turkey
Caesarea	Sdot Yam, Israel	Putcoli	Pozzuoli, Italy
Mariuma			
Camulodunum	Colchester, England	Sardis	Sart, Turkey
Carthage	Tunis, Tunisia	Side	Side, Turkey
Constantinople	Istanbul, Turkey	Sirmium	Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia
Corinth	Corinth, Greece	Stobi	Gradsko, Macedonia
Cyrene	Shahhat, Libya	Tarraco	Tarragona, Spain
Ephesos	Selçuk, Turkey	Thessaloniki	Thessaloniki, Greece
Gerasa	Jerash, Jordan	Tyre	Tyre, Lebanon
Kourion	Episkopi, Cyprus	Verona	Verona, Italy
Laodicea ad	Denizli, Turkey	Xanthos	Kinik, Antalya, Turkey
Lycum			

ABBREVIATIONS

LTUR = *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*

NOTES

- 1 Arena in this case refers to the level area in the interior of the

circus, an area that was surrounded by seats that defined its boundaries. The track occupied much but by no means all of a circus' arena.

2 The *euripus* was often slightly offset, further allowing more space where the chariots most needed it as they negotiated the turning points (*metae*).

3 Circuses in North Africa other than Lepcis Magna include those at Dougga, Cherchel, and Carthage (Humphrey 1986: 321–36).

4 There were two circuses at Caesarea Maritima: the relatively short one built by Herod and a longer one that dates to the second century CE. On the latter, see Humphrey 1986: 477–91.

5 On Domitian's stadium, see Lee 2000: 229–30 and *LTUR* 4. 341–4. The definitive work on the stadium is Colini 1943.

6 The term *theatron* here probably but not certainly designates an amphitheater.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For helpful introductory surveys on the venues in which Roman spectacles were staged, see Coleman 2000 and Dodge 2010.

Humphrey 1986 remains the essential study of the Roman circus, unsurpassed in its details, accuracy, and interpretation of the remains. Nelis-Clément and Roddaz 2008 is an important recent collection of essays on the circus. On circuses beyond Rome, see Landes, Kramérovskis, and Fuentes 1990 on the Byzantine Empire; Ostrasz 1991 and 1995 on Jordan; Roueché 1993 and Welch 1998b on Aphrodisias; Weiss 1996 on Caesarea; Basarrate and Sánchez-Palencia

2001 on Spain; Romano 2005 on Corinth; and Crummy 2008a and b on Colchester.

On the art and people of the circus, see Chapter 33. Golvin 1990 discusses obelisks in circuses. On animals and the circus, see Chapter 34.

On facilities for Greek sport at Rome (e.g., stadia, baths), see Colini 1943; Lee 2000; Newby 2005; and Chapter 36.

On theaters and spectacles Landes and Kramérovskis 1992 is an essential reference work. On adaptations of theaters for Roman spectacles, see Gebhard 1975; Moretti 1992; Welch 1998a and 1999; and Humphrey 1996.

On artificial lakes used for staged naval battles, see Golvin and Reddé 1990; Coleman's insightful 1993 essay; and the exhaustive study in Cariou 2009. On Late Imperial aquatic spectacles, Traversari 1960 remains the major work.

CHAPTER 39

People on the Margins of Roman Spectacle

Rose MacLean

1 Introduction

The Romans' games articulated and interrogated the norms that structured their society. Spectacles performed in the arena and circus manifested ideals such as military prowess (*virtus*) and seating arrangements reproduced, and sometimes contested, social and political categories. Discussions of these phenomena rightly focus on the major players, such as charioteers and gladiators, and on the interaction between emperors and the crowd.

However, it is also important to give due attention to other groups that, although participating in the games in less active or visible ways, contributed meaningfully to the ideological significance of these events. This essay will look at three such groups: condemned criminals, support personnel, and Jews and other non-Romans. The condemned criminals who provided mere bodies for destruction marked a level of dehumanization against which other participants could be measured. Support personnel such as attendants, grooms, and musicians were critical to the production of spectacles but subordinate to the contestants. Jews and other outsiders negotiated their relationship with Roman cultural frameworks in part through their reactions to what happened in the arena. Careful attention to the ways in which such persons were integrated into the games – and the ways in which they represented their own involvement – enrich our understanding of how Roman sport and spectacle reflected and shaped social values.

2 Condemned Criminals

Gladiators were paradoxical figures, in part because they embodied martial virtues that were prized in Roman society, and were thus frequently objects of widespread admiration, while occupying a low position on the social ladder (see Chapters 25, 30, and 32 in this volume). Prisoners executed in the arena, however, generally lacked the training and equipment necessary to create such powerful demonstrations of courage. Known as *noxii* (“criminals”) or *damnati ad bestias* (“those sentenced to be thrown to the beasts”), they were killed en masse in public executions in arenas or used as bait in beast hunts. One of the characters in Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* looks forward with anticipation to a set of games that were going to include “gladiators of renowned strength, animal-hunters of proven agility, and criminals too, without hope of reprieve, who were to provide a banquet of themselves to fatten the beasts” (4.13, trans. J. Hanson; on the text, see Hijmans 1977: 106–7). As Apuleius makes clear, the qualities of bravery and agility were evident in gladiators who fought each other in the arena and hunters (*venatores*) who fought against beasts in those same venues, but not in the *damnati* who were executed there. (For further discussion of beast hunts, see Chapter 34.)

The same distinction is apparent in a well-known mosaic from Zliten in North Africa, in which *venatores* are clearly distinguished from *damnati* (Aurigemma 1926: 131–201, figs. 77–8, pl. D; Dunbabin 1978: 17–18, 66, 109, figs. 46–9; Dunbabin 1999: 119–21). The latter figures are shown naked and unarmed, whereas the *venatores* are for the most part clothed and equipped with whips and spears. (For further discussion of public executions and an illustration of the relevant parts of the Zliten mosaic, see Chapter 35. On spectacle in Roman art, see Chapter 28.)

Although the condemned were sometimes made to fight one another, attendants called *confectores* (“finishers”) ensured that every throat was slit according to law (Kyle 1998: 158, 173 n. 18, 246–7). Some gladiators were convicts who had been sentenced to fight in the arena, but this punishment endowed them with greater agency than the criminals who served merely as cannon fodder.

A sentence of death by public execution in the arena could be administered for a range of infractions – most famously, for refusing to forsake Christianity – but was usually imposed only upon slaves, ex-slaves, prisoners of war, and freeborn persons from the lower orders. Social prejudice was so deeply embedded in the Roman legal system that holding the rank of town councilman or higher typically protected one from capital punishment, despite some glaring

exceptions (Garnsey 1970: 221–76).

Unarmed criminals slaughtered by animals represented the lowest possible rung of the human hierarchy, and they were treated in ways that highlighted their lack of status and that reinforced the prevailing social order. The position of *damnati* in the Roman social hierarchy was made clear in the brutality they suffered while being publicly executed and in the way their corpses were treated after they died. As Chris Epplett points out in his essay on spectacular executions (Chapter 35), condemned people in the Roman world were frequently executed in ways that were violent to the point of being overtly cruel, and Roman authorities routinely mutilated their corpses and denied them proper burial (Kyle 1998: 131–3). Such brutality ruffled the feathers of at least some contemporary observers, among whom we find Seneca complaining that he returned home “less humane” (*inhumanior*) after watching a midday execution amid the jeers of the crowd (*Letters from a Stoic* 7.3). For the majority of Roman spectators, however, these events would have helped to define the community of law-abiding citizens by drawing a stark contrast with the *damnati*.

Public executions in the arena thus marked a baseline against which to evaluate not just the status of the audience but also that of performers such as gladiators and *venatores*, who at least had the opportunity to fight for their lives and in the process win public acclaim. Nevertheless, as we have already learned from Seneca’s comment, even these distinctions could be contested. Tacitus concedes that a mock sea battle during the reign of the emperor Claudius “was fought with the spirit of courageous men, despite being fought among criminals”¹ (*Annals* 12.56.3; for further discussion see Chapter 38). Christian martyrs, in particular, resisted strict categorization as the passive recipients of state violence by making endurance (*hupomone*) a positive virtue and so departing from traditional models of elite male autonomy (Shaw 1996).

Nor was the space between the audience and *damnati* always so neatly maintained. Certain “bad emperors” were said to have cast innocent spectators into the fray. For example, in response to a spectator’s unflattering comment, Domitian had the man thrown to dogs in the arena (Suetonius *Domitian* 10.1). Similarly, Caligula is said to have had commoners from the stands thrown to the beasts simply because there was a shortage of convicts (Dio Cassius 59.10.3; Suetonius *Caligula* 27.1). At the same time as the men and women executed in the arena represented the lowest possible stratum of human society, they also had the potential to reveal the instability of the values and hierarchies that their deaths were meant to embody.

3 Support Personnel

The myriad personnel who oversaw the operation of the games also contributed to the ideologies that developed in and around Roman spectacle. As early as the reign of Tiberius (14–37 CE), officials were appointed to direct the supply and management of the imperial games (Lim 1996: 163–4). These were equestrian posts with duties that could cover large swaths of territory and bestowed legitimate honor on their occupants (*CIL* 3.249, 3925 and 6994; 5.8659).² Administrative posts related to spectacle are also attested in the career paths of imperial freedmen such as Tiberius Claudius Bucolas, who advanced from his job as a domestic servant in the palace to manager of imperial gladiatorial games (*procurator a muneribus*) before taking charge of the aqueducts and finally becoming chief steward (*CIL* 11.3612, 15.7279).³ Like his equestrian counterparts, Bucolas derived substantial prestige from his service to the emperor, despite the limitations imposed by his servile background.

On a smaller scale, troupes of gladiators were managed by professionals called *lanistae*, who rented out their performers to the *editores* responsible for organizing (and frequently at least partially funding) games. Unlike procurators, *lanistae* faced the same type of stigmatization that afflicted gladiators, actors, pimps, and criminals (Edwards 1997). Some *lanistae* had fought in the arena or were former slaves, but our legal sources indicate that just being in the business was enough to demote a person to the level of other *infames* (Kyle 1998: 83–4; Mosci Sassi 1992: 124–7; Wiedemann 1992: 28–30). Roman law coincided with social stereotypes that cast the managers of gladiatorial schools as vulgar and deceitful, lowly traders in human flesh. This attitude is reflected in the literary sources. Martial, for one, uses *lanista* as a term of invective alongside barbs that (to us) seem more obviously pejorative such as *calumniator* (“trickster”) and *fraudator* (“deceiver”) (*Epigrams* 11.66). Juvenal associates *lanistae* with other perceived usurpers of elite status at Rome (*Satires* 3.153–9). Whereas equestrians and even imperial freedmen framed their involvement with the production of games in terms of the civil service, the Romans’ attitudes toward *lanistae* more closely paralleled their ambivalence about gladiators.

Below this level of management, an extensive infrastructure of support personnel ran the gladiatorial schools and staffed the public events. Physicians (*medici*) treated injuries and watched over gladiators’ general health and nutrition. The physicians of the great games in Rome tended to be members of the emperor’s slave and freed household or slaves of imperial freedmen (*CIL* 6.9572 and 10171–3; cf. *Inscriptiones Graecae* IV 365). But skillful and attentive practitioners

were crucial to any training facility, especially given gladiators' high market value (*ILS* 5163; Dunkle 2008: 54–5). In fact, the Greek medical writer Galen spent part of his early career as the physician for a troupe of gladiators that belonged to the high priests of Pergamon. Galen describes attending to fighters' wounds – which were commonly sustained in the arms, buttocks, and thighs – and managing their diet (Galen 6.529 and 13.599 Kühn). His mastery of the field was proven by the fact that only two combatants died during his first term of service, versus sixteen under his predecessor.⁴ Although Galen came from a well-to-do family, the pride he invests in his success treating gladiators may well apply to the slave and freed *medici* who are identified as such in inscriptions.

Not to be confused with physicians, *doctores* (“trainers,” also called *magistri*) worked in training schools to prepare gladiators for the arena. One of Martial's *Epigrams* issues ironic praise for a certain Hermes, who was “an expert in all types of weapons” and “a gladiator as well as a trainer” (5.24). In reality, most *doctores* were probably retired fighters who specialized in one or two styles of combat (Dunkle 2008: 40–2). We also hear of *magistri* who trained wild beasts for the *venatio* and might be mauled by their charges or, in one rare image, licked on the hand (Martial *Spectacles* 12, 21, 26; Coleman 2006: 113–19, 161–4, 186–94; cf. Chapter 34). The funerary monuments of gladiatorial trainers suggest that, like other professionals, they viewed their work as a marker of personal identity. A man named Gratus, for example, is remembered as having trained *murmillos* (*CIL* 6.10174), Q. Fabius Viator worked with *secutores* (*CIL* 6.4333), and C. Futius Hyacinthus is commemorated by an epitaph that cites his role as a trainer of *hoplomachi* (*CIL* 6.37842). Like physicians, these men were directly involved in gladiators' success or failure, and some even commissioned tombstones for fallen combatants (*CIL* 5.5402 and 10183).

A variety of workers of other kinds were also part of the Roman games' support personnel. Slave and freed attendants (*ministri* or *harenarii*) were charged with such unglamorous tasks as carrying weapons, bringing water, or helping a wounded fighter out of the ring. *Unctores* (“masseurs”) administered therapeutic massage (*ILS* 5084) and female slaves called *ludiae* are attested in the literary sources as providing companionship to the gladiators (Martial *Epigrams* 5.24.10; Juvenal *Satires* 6.104 and 266; Dunkle 2008: 44). Although these women likely performed domestic duties as well, Roman masters viewed sexual relationships between slaves as an effective mechanism of social control (Bradley 1987: 50–1). Builders constructed the staging and machinery needed for the elaborate spectacles and were reportedly thrown into the ring by the emperor

Claudius if any of these props malfunctioned (Suetonius *Claudius* 34.2). Undertakers were contracted to dispose of corpses, although precise methods of burial continue to be debated by scholars (Kyle 1998: 155–71; Bodel 2000).

Attendants and other subsidiaries also played an important role in the running of the actual events. They appeared in the processions that opened the games (*pompae*) or even during breaks in the fighting (Junkelmann 2000a: 130–1 and 135). A marble relief from Pompeii shows *ministri* in a *pompa* carrying a placard, prizes, and weapons and holding the reins of horses (Jacobelli 2003: 95–6 and fig. 77). Special staff were required to operate the awnings (*vela*) that shaded the seating areas, and soldiers policed the Colosseum to protect spectators and avert riots like the one that broke out at Pompeii in 59 CE (Montilla 1969; Scobie 1988: 219–24). More prominent, though still on the sidelines, *praecones* (“announcers”) and musicians competed with the roar of the crowd to produce a soundtrack for the games. Two referees – a *summa rudis* assisted by a *secunda rudis* – held gladiators to the rules of combat (Fagan 2011: 225–7; Junkelmann 2000b: 64–8; Simpson 2000). These officials were drawn from both the servile and freeborn population, and the fact that a *collegium* of head referees existed during the reign of Hadrian is a testament to their central importance (Ville 1981: 369; Robert 1940: 138–9).

Chariot races also depended on an infrastructure of personnel with a range of functions and titles, although the precise role of some staff is unknown (for a detailed discussion of chariot racing, see Chapter 33). At the beginning of a race, attendants were positioned inside the starting gates to help control impatient horses; these functionaries were probably the *moratores* (“delayers”) whom we find attested in inscriptions. Workers identified as *tentores* were responsible for pulling a lever that opened the gates when the magistrate gave the signal (Humphrey 1986: 166). *Hortatores* (“cheerers”) shouted encouragement and advice from horseback or on foot, and *sparsores* (“sprinklers”) splashed water on the animals as they ran. We also hear of farriers (*sutores*), faction managers (*conditores*), physicians (*medici*), and trainers, as well as slave managerial staff (*vilici*) employed by the circus factions (CIL 6.10074–6; Junkelmann 2000c: 98–9).

Literary and visual depictions of slave and freed personnel tend to cast them in active but supporting roles, thus articulating yet another level in the social hierarchy mapped out at the games. Attendants did not suffer the same dehumanizing treatment as *damnati ad bestias*, nor were they endowed with the capacity to demonstrate courage through victory. A “finisher” who slit the throat of a criminal emphasized his victim’s subordination to all other participants, including the audience, yet the servants who waited on gladiators and charioteers

elevated the prestige of these performers. An apt comparison may be drawn with tombstones portraying Roman soldiers accompanied by assistants and grooms (Anderson 1984: 44 and 58–9). Likewise, Petronius's *nouveau riche* freedman Trimalchio plays ball with the aid of slave boys and eunuchs (*Satyricon* 27), a caricature that nonetheless alludes to a social environment where being surrounded by servants was an assertion of privilege. Against this background, support personnel were critical not only to producing the games, but also to filling the conceptual space between *damnati* and performers such as gladiators.

Here again, however, we encounter a distinction that becomes more complicated upon closer inspection. Inscribed monuments, in particular, present an alternative view of the relationship between attendants and performers. An excellent example of this phenomenon can be found in an inscription, probably dating to the reign of Domitian, that integrates charioteers with other, less prominent functionaries (*CIL* 6.10046 = *ILS* 5313; Potter 2010: 317–19):

The association for four-horse chariot-racing (*familia quadrigaria*) of Titus Ateius Capito of the Red Faction, for which Chrestus was treasurer, distributed oil to the *decurii* (officials) who are inscribed below: Marcus Vipsanius Docimus Migio, Docimus the *vilicus*, Chrestus the *conditor*, Epaphrus the *sellarius*,⁵ Menander the *agitator* (charioteer), Apollonius the *agitator*, Cerdo the *agitator*, Liccaeus the *agitator*, Helletus the assistant *conditor*, Publius Quinctius Primus, Hyllus the *medicus*, Anterotes the *tentor*, Antiochus the *sutor*, Parnaces the *tentor*, Marcus Vipsanius Calamus, Marcus Vipsanius Dareus, Erotas the *tentor*, Marcus Vipsanius Faustus, Hilarius the *agitator*, Nicander the *agitator*, Epigonus the *agitator*, Alexander the *agitator*, Nicephorus the *sparsor*, Alexion the *morator*. (trans. D. Potter, slightly modified)

This text opens with a reference to an association for chariot racing that was part of the Red faction. The list of names that follows records the recipients of jars of oil without any obvious preference for charioteers over support staff. Rather than foregrounding the charioteers, who were by all rights the stars of the show, this layout emphasizes cohesion within the faction.

The epigraphic evidence for camaraderie among members of gladiatorial troupes points in a similar direction. As already noted, some *doctores* took responsibility for erecting tombstones for gladiators. An epitaph from the Ludus Matutinus in Rome, a site for the training of *venatores*, was commissioned by a physician named Claudius Agathocles for himself and three others (*CIL* 6.10171): “Claudius Agathocles, freedman of Augustus, physician at the Ludus

Matutinus, commissioned this tombstone for himself and Claudius, a *lanista* of Augustus; for Primitivus, manager of the *spoliarium*; and for Thelesphorus, a *retarius*. May the earth rest lightly upon you.” This epitaph brings together not just gladiators and support personnel, but individuals of varying functions and legal status. We have already encountered physicians and *lanistae*, both of whom were important figures in the *ludus*. Here we also find a manager of the *spoliarium*, probably a facility where the armor and clothes were stripped from those killed in the arena and corpses were prepared for burial (Kyle 1998: 158–9). From the perspective of a Roman audience, the *retarius*, a type of gladiator that fought with a trident and net, is the only member of this group who had access to honor acquired through acts of courage; however successful at their professions, the others would not have had the same opportunities to demonstrate *virtus*. The monument commissioned by Agathocles transcends this distinction in favor of conveying a sense of unity within the *ludus*.

Physicians and trainers were not the only staff who took pride in their vocational skill. By way of example, let us return to the musicians who played during the opening ceremonies and gladiatorial contests – usually a combination of flute players and trumpeters. These performers, along with a pipe organist, appear in two corners of the Zliten mosaic in a composition that accentuates both the musicians’ importance to and separation from the violent battles for glory (Aurigemma 1926: fig. 77 and pl. D; Dunbabin 1978: figs. 46–9). Similarly, in a graffito preserved at Pompeii, two gladiators are engaged in combat, supported on the right by three flute players and on the left by four trumpeters (Langner 2001: no. 1007). The graffittist has included the gladiators’ names and records of victories, whereas the musicians remain anonymous. More than simple gestures at realism, these images reflect the perspective of the freeborn citizen audience, which would have located such functionaries in an intermediate zone between athletic stardom and objectification.

Musicians, however, had access to another form of commemoration in which they were able to take center stage. In epitaphs like this one, from the Italian town of Venafrum, we find a flutist gaining posthumous honor from his participation in the arena:

Sacred to the divine shades. Please stop for a moment, traveler, as you hurry along, and listen to my words as if you had asked me, since you yourself expect death to come. I am Iustus, called not by my father’s but by my mother’s surname; indeed, my father was poor, but my fame was rich. Playing one pipe, then the other, calling out with a flute-player’s song, I beckoned swordsmen of Mars to arms as I goaded them on with my signal. I lived 21

years, 11 months, and 29 days. Although my name was “Just,” I died an untimely death. His parents set up this monument for their incomparable son. (CIL 10.4915 = ILS 5150 = *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 1319)

This inscription contains several forms common to Latin funerary epigraphy. It is a poem written in the voice of the deceased that appeals directly to passers-by, and like many epitaphs, it mentions the commemorand’s occupation and age at death. Although the text contains no clear indication of Iustus’s legal status, the fact that he took his mother’s surname and refers to his father as “poor” strongly suggests a servile background (cf. Horace *Odes* 2.20.5–6 and 3.30.11). Iustus’s epitaph contrasts his parentage with the “rich” fame that he acquired over the course of his brief career, and flourishes in the Latin imbue these verses with a literary sensibility that helps to support such a claim. “Playing one pipe, then the other” (*modulans alterna*) resonates with Vergil’s *Eclogues* (5.14), “swordsmen of Mars” (*Martii gladiantes*) is a particularly elaborate way of referring to gladiators, and the concluding pun on the injustice of Iustus’s death conveys a playful attention to language.

Differentiation among the participants in Roman spectacles thus presented a partial diagram of society, from utterly dehumanized *damnati ad bestias* to servants, combatants and administrators, not to mention the levels of stratification that distinguished spectators from one another. Even groups that did not take center stage were key players in the construction of social values. Further, the depiction of certain functionaries, particularly in funerary contexts, helped to reveal the instability of the idealized order by emphasizing the corporate body over individual status or attributing honor to subordinate roles. Romans who attended the games thus witnessed a performance of the power dynamics that organized their interactions with one another. Yet when confronted with the alternative voices that issued above all from inscriptions, such viewers would have been reminded that the dominant ideologies were open to question from both above and below.

4 Jews and Other Non-Romans

The gradual dissemination of Roman power created a situation in which literally hundreds of distinct ethnic groups adopted aspects of Roman culture to at least some degree. This was a complex process that involved varying levels of active acceptance, compulsion, acquiescence, and resistance. Spectacle, as a public enactment of

Roman norms and practices, was a particularly important setting where this process was played out.

Let us consider the Jews as a test case for how outsiders were integrated into Roman spectacle or resisted such integration. The leaders of the Jewish community rejected gladiatorial games on religious and moral grounds. In some ways, no doubt, the games also signified to Jews the political authority that Romans exerted over their homeland. Construction of the Colosseum began in the early 70s CE after the conclusion of the first Jewish War, and Jewish prisoners may have labored on it (Leon 1995: 32–3; cf. Millar 2005). The dedicatory inscription on the structure's façade announced to literate viewers that "Vespasian ordered this to be built from the spoils [i.e., of his victory in Judea]" (Alföldy 1995). The most famous amphitheater in the Roman Empire thus stood as a monument to the subjection of the Jews. Further, Josephus records that Titus executed thousands of Jewish captives by throwing them to the beasts or compelling them to fight one another, and the triumph that Vespasian and Titus celebrated at Rome included a procession of Jewish prisoners (Josephus *The Jewish Wars* 2.1, 3.1 and 5.5–6). For all the legal privileges bestowed upon Jews by certain emperors, public spectacles would have helped to advertise this group's political subordination.

Jews were widely dispersed around the Roman Empire, particularly after the failed rebellions against Roman rule in Judea that took place in 66–70 and 132–5 CE. In the Roman world other than Judea, Jews were typically seen as social outsiders with distinctive customs and the capacity to act as a collective (e.g., Cicero *For Lucius Flaccus* 67; Juvenal *Satires* 14.96–106). The perceived alterity of Jews would have been sharpened by their absence at the games or, alternatively, would have conditioned the experiences of Jews who did decide to join the mass of spectators. Although we hear of seats reserved for Jews in provincial theaters, the situation may not have been the same at Rome (Weiss 1999: 44; cf. Williams 1998). In fact, a substantial portion of Jews were probably Roman citizens and therefore eligible to blend with the rest of the audience (Philo *On the Embassy to Gaius* 23.155). Jews at Rome would have found themselves in the position of negotiating multiple identities simultaneously, in the first place deciding whether to attend the games, then whether to sit with each other or mingle with the rest of the crowd, and finally how to respond to the displays of martial valor and imperialism that were acted out in the arena.

For Jews in Palestine, however, Greeks and Romans were the outsiders, and even before the Roman period, Jews debated the benefits of adopting Greek customs. The conflict between those who

supported this type of assimilation and those with more conservative views was a primary factor behind the Maccabean revolt of 173–64 BCE. Under Antiochos IV Epiphanes, Jason gained control of the high priesthood and took a number of steps toward Hellenization, including the construction of a *gymnasium* for the inculcation of Greek culture (2 *Maccabees* 4.9–15, 18–19; Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 12.237–41; Kennell 2005; Poliakoff 1993). The second Book of Maccabees chastises Jason for “extreme wickedness” and describes how the priests neglected their duties in favor of wrestling and throwing the discus (2 *Maccabees* 4.13–15). These and other violations of tradition sparked a rebellion. Although the details and implications of this revolt lie beyond the scope of the present discussion, it is worth recalling that sport had already provided a forum in which Jews debated their relationship to Greek culture.

A similar debate took shape under the Roman Empire, when Jews were again confronted with a ruling authority whose beliefs and practices did not match their own. Roman-style gladiatorial combat and *venationes* were introduced to the Levant by Herod the Great (c.73–4 BCE), whose hold on power depended heavily on Roman aid. Having been appointed King of the Jews by the Senate in 40 BCE and taken Jerusalem in 37, Herod needed to cultivate policies that would both avert a Jewish rebellion and please his Roman supporters. On the one hand, Herod’s restoration of the Temple and other acts of piety conveyed his support for Judaism both locally and across the Roman world (Richardson 1996: 247–9). On the other hand, a client king was nothing without Roman favor, and Herod worked to maintain his standing in part by funding spectacles that demonstrated his loyalty to the central power.

Herod’s task was made more difficult by the political upheaval at Rome after the defeat of his friend Mark Antony at Actium (Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 15.187–201, *The Jewish Wars* 1.387–95). Herod smoothed things over with Augustus (still at that point known as Octavian) and went to great lengths to solidify this alliance. In contrast to the Temple project, he founded periodic games in honor of Augustus’s victory at Actium and built a hippodrome, theater, and amphitheater at Jerusalem. Whereas Herod had enough concern for local sentiment to build the last two structures outside the walls, Josephus describes the games founded by Herod as a degradation of native custom (*Jewish Antiquities* 15.267–91). Worst of all, Herod decorated the amphitheater with honorific inscriptions and trophies that many Jews considered idolatrous. Facing an uproar, Herod summoned the people to the amphitheater, disassembled the trophies down to the poles on which they were hung, and asked whether mere sticks could be graven images. Some laughed, but others were so

enraged that they plotted to assassinate Herod and might have succeeded were they not discovered and brutally killed. This dramatic episode shows how spectacle once again facilitated a dialogue about the confrontation of native and foreign traditions, and although Herod recognized the multiplicity of opinions, the final outcome reinforced his supremacy.

Herod's patronage of the games did more for his alliance with the Romans than for his popularity in Judea, but the conversation was far from over. In fact, as one recent study has shown, Palestinian Jews began slowly to accept the Roman games as part of their cultural milieu (Weiss 1999). As early as the late first century CE, and more noticeably in the second and third, structures for mass entertainment began to proliferate in this region (Lee 2003: 38–44).

The Jewish community did not remain completely aloof from Roman sport and spectacle, which elsewhere were a primary engine for provincial acculturation (see Chapter 42). Jewish reactions to the games reflect not only a dialogue between center and periphery, but also between coreligionists who differed even among themselves about how to manage their interactions with Rome.

5 Conclusion

Roman sport did more than reiterate prevailing hierarchies and enforce dominant ideological frameworks; rather, it brought to light the diverse perspectives that contributed to social discourse. Even condemned criminals, who represented an extreme of dehumanization, were in some cases able to modify their position by finding ways to exhibit prized virtues. Likewise, although the parts played by attendants and other personnel were subordinate to those of gladiators and charioteers, the epigraphic evidence shows that these functionaries gained a sense of collective and individual identity from their involvement in the production of spectacles. Finally, in the case of the Jews, we have witnessed how an array of responses to the Roman games that issued from a single religious community reflected a larger debate about acculturation as it evolved over time. Although gladiators and charioteers commanded the greatest attention – and will surely remain a focal point of contemporary thinking about ancient games – the role of sport and spectacle in the Roman world was determined by a wide range of participants, including those at the margins.

ABBREVIATIONS

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

ILS = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*

NOTES

1 Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Latin texts provided here are my own.

2 The equestrians (in Latin, *equites*) formed a distinct and high-ranking legal and social group in Roman society. For further discussion, see Alföldy 1985 (1975): 122–33.

3 On Claudius Bucolas and the position of *procurator a muneribus*, see Friedländer 1928–36 (1901): vol. 4: 50–2 and Weaver 1972: 274.

4 On Galen, see the articles collected in Hankinson 2008.

5 A *sellarius* was a male prostitute, a *cellarius* was a person in charge of a storeroom. The person who cut the inscription may have erred here (Potter 2010: 317).

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

In the absence of a comprehensive treatment of marginal groups that participated in the Roman games, the best path of entry into this subject is through the relevant pages of more general studies. See, for instance, Dunkle 2008; Kyle 1998; Ville 1981; and Wiedemann 1992. The epigraphic sources are best approached with the aid of Bodel 2001, and those interested in working more closely with the inscriptions will appreciate the databases now online, particularly those of the Electronic Archive of Greek and Latin Epigraphy (<http://www.edr-edr.it>); Clauss/Slaby (www.manfredclauss.de); and the Packard Humanities Institute (<http://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions>).

On the status of gladiators and other performers in the arena, see Edwards 1997 and Potter 2010. On public executions in Rome, see Chapter 35 and the references cited therein.

On Roman officials that administered sport and spectacle, see Lim 1996. The various personnel involved in gladiatorial shows are discussed in detail in Mosci Sassi 1992. Nutton 2004 provides an excellent introduction to the topic of ancient medicine. On Galen in particular, see the articles in Hankinson 2008. On the personnel involved in circus racing, see Chapter 33 in this volume, Potter 2010: 312–27, and the references cited therein. On the musical component of Roman spectacle, see Simpson 2000. Joshel 1992 draws heavily on inscriptions to show how occupation affected personal and group identities.

Bickerman 1962 contains a foundational discussion of the Maccabees, and Perowne 1956 is a readable though somewhat dated account of the reign of Herod the Great. See now also Richardson 1996. On the attitude of Jews toward Greek sport, see Kennell 2005 and Poliakoff 1993. On the attitude of Jews toward Roman spectacle, see Weiss 1999. For a classic study of the Jews at Rome, see Leon 1995, but also now Cappelletti 2006. Many valuable essays on the Jews' relationship to Greco-Roman culture are collected by Goodman 1998.

CHAPTER 40

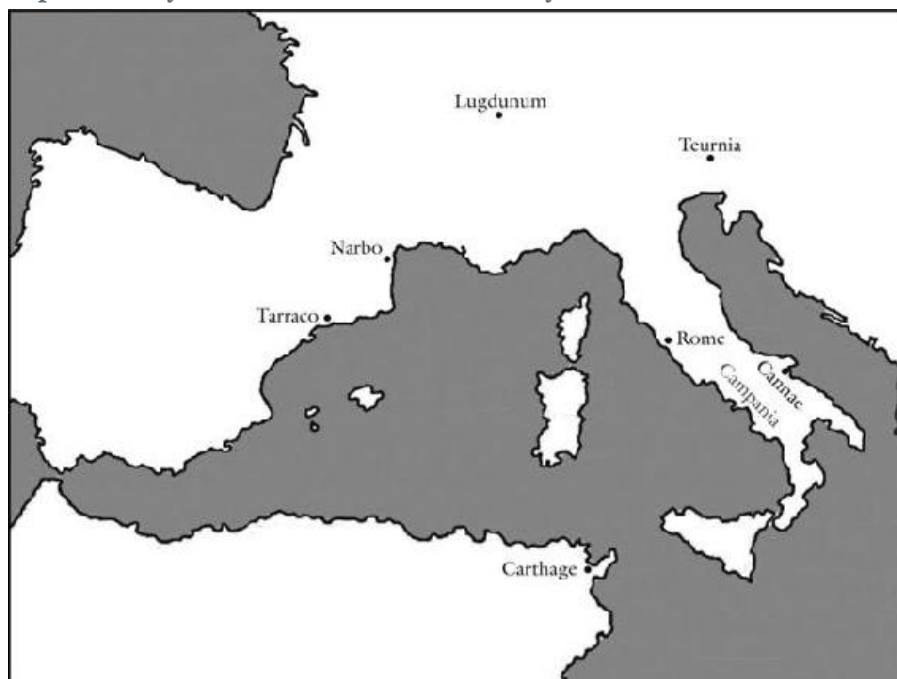
Religion and Roman Spectacle

John Zaleski

1 Origins

In the introduction to her study of the Roman games, Alison Futrell describes a striking pattern of events during the period of civil war following Caesar's assassination: Italy was filled with bizarre omens or "prodigies" – manifestations of the gods' displeasure. A statue of Jupiter shed blood; rivers reversed their course and ran dry. In a desperate measure to restore peace with the gods, the Romans instituted games and festivals in the gods' honor (Futrell 1997: 1–2).

As Futrell's study suggests, this pattern may be observed repeatedly in Roman history (Futrell 1997: 197–9). In the late third century BCE, as Hannibal sat entrenched in Campania, rumors proliferated of androgynous children, temples destroyed by lightning, and stones falling from the sky (Harmon 1988: 248). Romans tried all means to win back the gods' favor. These included, most famously, the live burial of two couples, Gallic and Greek, in the Forum Boarium at Rome (Livy 22.57.6). The Senate also introduced new festival games, or *ludi*. In 212 BCE, after consulting the Sibylline books (a collection of oracles maintained by the Roman state), the Senate established a one-day festival in honor of Apollo, with sacrifices and chariot racing in the Circus Maximus. After a plague in 208, this festival was made a yearly event (Livy 27.23.5–7; Bernstein 1998: 171–86; Scullard 1981: 159–60). In 204 another annual festival was added with the institution of equestrian and theatrical performances in honor of the "Great Mother" goddess, whose sacred stone was imported to Rome from Asia Minor (Livy 29.10.6; Bernstein 1998: 186–206; Orlin 2010: 156–9; Scullard 1981: 97–100). New gods, new games, and new festivals would – so was the hope – save the Roman state.



The introduction of new *ludi* during the Hannibalic war points to the military and religious origin of the games. The earliest known *ludi* were, in most cases, given by generals who vowed to hold games in honor of the gods if victorious in battle. These *ludi votivi* were an act of thanksgiving for military victory. Even more, they were the fulfillment of a vow that had secured victory in the first place – a retroactive payment to the gods in exchange for their aid. By their nature these games were irregular events. By at least 366 BCE, however, we find an annual festival, the *ludi Romani* (Scullard 1981: 182–7). It used to be thought that this annual festival represented the insertion of the *ludi votivi* into the Roman calendar.¹ More recent studies, however, have shown that the *ludi Romani* developed separately from the votive games and may have been celebrated annually as early as 509 or 507 BCE (Bernstein 1998: 51–78; Versnel 1970: 111–15).

The *ludi Romani* were dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus – the *caput*, or head of the Roman people – whose temple commanded the Capitoline hill. The games commenced in the Circus Maximus with a parade of charioteers, musicians, and dancers, followed by a procession of the statues of the gods and finally a sacrifice of oxen (Dionysius of Halicarnassos 7.72). Other early games had similar religious and often military dimensions. For example, the *equirria*, horse-racing festivals dedicated to Mars, celebrated the

commencement both of the agricultural year and the campaigning season (Bernstein 1999; Scullard 1981: 82, 89).

That the earliest games celebrated military victory suggests their connection with one of the most public of Roman spectacles: the triumphal march of the victorious general upon his return to Rome. In fact, the *ludi votivi* were distinct events from the early triumphs, sometimes taking place years after the triumphal march (Versnel 1970: 107). The two events shared, however, a common origin: the need to repay the gods (and in particular Jupiter), through acts of thanksgiving, sacrifice, and honor, for sending victory to Rome's armies. The crowning moment of the triumph was the dedication of the general's *fascēs* (the symbols of his military and political power) to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, along with a sacrifice to Jupiter in his temple on the Capitoline.

Some scholars have seen the victorious general as personifying Jupiter during the triumph. The general, or *triumphator*, wore purple vestments, embroidered with palm branches and gold stars, described as the "adornment of Jupiter" (*ornatus Iovis*, Livy 10.7.10). The general's face was painted red, like the red-faced cult statue of Jupiter on the Capitoline. The well-known words of the slave who rode in the back of the *triumphator's* chariot – "Remember you are but a man" (*hominem te esse memento*) – may indicate a fear that the general would exaggerate his temporary divine status.

It was Sir James Frazer who popularized the notion of the triumphant general as Jupiter, using the evidence from Roman triumphs to support his theory of primitive divine kingship (Frazer 1911–15: vol. 2: 174–94). Few scholars today would endorse Frazer's broader theories, but the notion of the *triumphator* as Jupiter remains influential. Versnel provided the authoritative statement of this view, arguing that the triumphant general appeared both as a king and as Jupiter. The exultant cry of "*Io triumphe!*" with which soldiers and citizens hailed the victorious commander was nothing less than an appeal for divine epiphany (Versnel 1970: 38–55, 84–93). More recently, skepticism has come from Mary Beard, who argues that the identification of *triumphator* with Jupiter was the result of notions of deification that did not appear until the end of the Roman Republic (c.509–31 BCE) and the beginning of the Imperial period (31 BCE–476 CE) (Beard 2007: 219–56).

Like the early horse- and chariot-racing festivals, Roman gladiatorial games developed in a religious context.² This context was, however, quite different from that of the *ludi*. While the *ludi* were public celebrations, funded by the state and dedicated to a god in communal thanksgiving, gladiatorial games began as part of a funeral rite arranged by the family of the deceased.³ The first known

gladiatorial games at Rome were organized by Marcus and Decimus Brutus in the Forum Boarium in 264 BCE as part of their father's funeral (Valerius Maximus 2.4.7; Livy *Epitome* 16; Dunkle 2008: 12–13).

The Roman name for a gladiatorial contest was *munus* (plural *munera*) – an “obligation” or “duty” owed to a deceased relative (normally the head of the family), who had joined the realm of the *manes*, the spirits of the dead. This has led some to suppose, both in ancient and modern times, that the early gladiatorial *munus* was a form of human sacrifice given to the spirits of the dead. Tertullian, an early Christian writer, based a critique of traditional Roman entertainment on this supposition. The ancients sacrificed slaves and captives at funerals, Tertullian wrote, because they believed that the spirits of the dead (*animae defunctorum*) were propitiated by human blood. Later on, however, they attempted to conceal this “impiety” (*impietas*) with “pleasure” (*voluptas*), and so trained men (i.e., gladiators) to fight at funerals (*On Spectacles* 12).

The classic appraisal of this idea appears in Georges Ville's foundational study *La Gladiature en Occident* (1981). It was likely, Ville argued, that a funerary sacrifice of captive enemies, family members, or slaves had been practiced in some areas of Italy in earlier periods. Further, it was possible that, in exceptional cases, gladiatorial fighting had served as a substitute for human sacrifice. Nonetheless, the Romanized form of gladiatorial fighting, in Ville's view, was not a form of human sacrifice (Ville 1981: 9–13). Owing to his premature death, Ville did not have a chance to develop this argument. This was done by Paul Veyne who completed Ville's manuscript from his notes. Gladiatorial fighting, Veyne argued, was “agonistic” rather than “sacrificial,” belonging to a broader group of *ludi funebres* (funeral games). Furthermore, the original religious or funerary character of gladiatorial combat was quickly lost, as the offering of *munera* became a political act. With this “*laïcisation*” of the games, gladiatorial fighting became “pure spectacle,” devoid of any real religious meaning (Ville 1981: 14–19).

2 Theories and Critique of Secularization

Any argument for the religious significance of the games is, to a large extent, an attempt to overturn the idea that the games at some point became “pure spectacle.” This process of secularization is usually

linked to one of politicization. As Veyne writes, funerals became an excuse for a man of ambition to increase his popularity, and thus his chances of election to political office, by offering entertainment in the form of gladiatorial games (Ville 1981: 16). This “abuse” of the games increased amid the political competition of the Late Republic. It became almost an expectation that aediles or praetors who hoped to run for consulship would provide *munera*, even though they did so in connection with family funerals and not by virtue of their office (Wiedemann 1992: 7).⁴ The Senate issued a series of laws attempting to prevent the use of gladiatorial games for electoral bribery. In 63 BCE, under Cicero’s consulship, the Senate passed the *lex Tullia de ambitu*, preventing the offering of *munera* within two years of candidacy for office (Dunkle 2008: 168–9).

Ludi votivi were likewise apt to serve political means. One dimension of the struggle for power between Pompey and Caesar was the provision of lavish games in Rome (Beacham 1999: 45–91). After witnessing Pompey’s votive games in 55 BCE, Cicero declared, “The most elaborate and magnificent games in human memory are upon us. Not only have games such as these never been seen in the past – I cannot imagine how they could be matched in the future” (*Against Piso* 65; cf. *Letters to His Friends* 7.1.3).⁵ Cicero’s impression notwithstanding, Pompey was soon outdone by Caesar. His triumphal games in 46 BCE were the most expensive and extravagant yet, with gladiatorial fighting, theatrical shows, chariot races, pyrrhic dancing, beast combats, a staged military battle in the Circus, and even a staged naval battle. Shortly before Caesar’s death, the Senate decreed that all *munera* given in Italy were to have a special day dedicated to his honor (Dio Cassius 44.6.2).

The decisive step in the imperial appropriation of the games was taken by Augustus, who monopolized control of the *ludi Romani* and set strict limitations on the number of *munera* that magistrates could give and the amount of money they could spend on them (Beacham 1999: 92–154). With the imperial family now in charge of the games, the people looked to their *princeps* for entertainment. Augustus did not disappoint. As he boasted in a short autobiographical statement that formed part of his will, he offered eight sets of gladiatorial games, in which 10,000 men took part. He funded almost 30 *ludi* and put on 26 *venationes* (beast hunts), in which 3,500 animals were killed (*Res Gestae* 22).

The history of the political utilization of the games parallels what is usually seen as the political abuse of religion during the long period of instability endured by Rome in the first century BCE. The Roman practice of *auspicia*, or ensuring that an action was in accord with the will of the gods, was particularly liable to manipulation. The night

before any elective or legislative assembly, a magistrate watched the skies along with an augur, looking for a heavenly sign indicating Jupiter's approval. If the magistrate wanted to prevent the assembly from meeting, he only needed to ensure that his augur failed to see a sign, and the meeting would have to be postponed. In addition, a bad omen could instantly invalidate an assembly. This provided Pompey with a useful pretext for fixing the praetorian elections in 55 BCE. In the first round, Cato, one of Pompey's political enemies, was elected. After the vote, however, Pompey declared that he had heard a thunderclap – an obvious sign of Jupiter's displeasure. The election was dissolved, and reconvened only after Pompey had succeeded in removing Cato's supporters (Rosenberger 2007; Taylor 1949: 76–97).

One may, of course, question the very notion of political abuse of religion in a culture in which religion was governed by official state worship.⁶ This is even more apparent with the rise of the imperial cult, in which the emperor became the unifying figure of both religion and the state. Accordingly, we should not see the games of the Early Empire as turning into devices of secular political power and thereby losing their religious meaning. It is more accurate to say that the games attained a new significance, simultaneously religious and political, under the umbrella of the cult of emperors. The *ludi saeculares* offered by Augustus in 17 BCE were not “secular games” but rather games celebrating a new *saeculum* – a cyclical period of 100 or 109 years, whose transition was marked by signs and prodigies (Forsythe 2012: 49–76). Claudius celebrated the games again in 47 CE on the pretext that Augustus had miscalculated the date of the new *saeculum* (Suetonius *Claudius* 21.2). Like Augustus, he wished to be seen as the herald of a new age of prosperity. The games reinforced this promise and the divine rule upon which it was contingent (Harmon 1988: 249).

In addition, arena spectacles appear to have played a role in the promotion of the imperial cult in the provinces. In the West, the imperial cult was first established in Lugdunum (Lyon), as a means of pacifying and integrating Gaul into the Empire. The amphitheater at Lugdunum, situated at the west end of the imperial sanctuary, contained special seating for the Gallic tribal representatives who came to the city on August 1st for a festival dedicated to the goddess Roma and the living emperor. Similarly the Flavian temple complex in Narbo (Narbonne), dedicated to the imperial *divi* (cult of the emperors), incorporated an amphitheater within the sanctuary (Futrell 1997: 79–93; Fishwick 1987–2005: vol. 1.1: 97–137). (For further discussion of this issue, see Chapter 38 in this volume.)

Beyond making these qualifications to the secularization thesis, scholars have argued that the games retained ritual and symbolic

significance throughout the Late Republic and Empire. A few scholars have even returned to the theory of gladiatorial combat as human sacrifice (e.g., Le Glay 1990: 220; Futrell 1997: 169–210). The strongest statement of this theory has come from Alison Futrell in her study on the political and religious context of gladiatorial *munera*. Futrell takes aim at a tendency, which she traces to Ville and Veyne, to “secularize, even to trivialize, the arena” as mere spectacle and bloodlust (1997: 169). In Futrell’s view, gladiatorial fighting was a form of ritualized combat that recalled the military valor and *Romanitas* of the Roman people stretching back to the foundational death – or human sacrifice – of Remus at the hands of Romulus. The death of the gladiator was a “foundation sacrifice” that restored Rome and reaffirmed her military *virtus* in times of crisis (Futrell 1997: 170, 205–10).

The immediate objection facing Futrell’s interpretation is that there is little evidence outside of Christian polemical sources (e.g., Tertullian) that Romans acknowledged a connection between gladiatorial combat and human sacrifice. Futrell, however, argues that any form of ritualized death enacted with religious goals is human sacrifice – even though in most cases the agents tend not to acknowledge, but to distance themselves from the sacrificial character of the act (Futrell 1997: 207–8). Other scholars have preferred a narrower definition of sacrifice. David Potter, for example, criticizes the theory of gladiatorial sacrifice by arguing that the deaths of gladiators do not resemble those of Roman sacrificial victims, who were typically killed by live burial, or throat slitting on a funeral pyre (Potter 2010: 329–30). Potter’s argument, of course, is not simply a historical but a hermeneutical one, maintaining the importance of a ritual’s external form and suggesting, in effect, that a broad construal of sacrifice stretches the category beyond its analytical usefulness.

A different approach, proposed by Thomas Wiedemann, sees the symbolic significance of *munera* not in the death or sacrifice, but in the survival of the gladiator. The gladiator was *infamis*, a slave deserving of death and already dead to society. But by showing valor in the arena, the gladiator could triumph over death. Most fights ended, in fact, not with a death blow, but with the surrender of one of the combatants. The organizer of the *munus* would then decide whether the defeated gladiator should live or die, but his decision was determined by the petition of the spectators. If death was decreed, the gladiator could at least meet his end with courage and acceptance. But if the gladiator had, in the eyes of the crowd, displayed *virtus* in combat, he would be allowed to live and fight again. Someday, he might even hope to earn his freedom. Thus he could “rise from the socially dead, and rejoin the society of the living” (Wiedemann 1992:

According to Wiedemann, this sense of gladiatorial resurrection competed with Christian concepts of salvation. Christians, too, were accustomed to seeing the arena as a venue for the passage from death to life. The martyr faced death in the arena and gained life in the world to come. To Christian eyes, the gladiator usurped this privilege, achieving resurrection not through the faith or sacraments of the church, but through the life-giving power of the Roman people (Wiedemann 1992: 155–6).

3 Gods, Curses, and Devotions

Categories such as “sacrifice,” “resurrection,” or “secularization” provide helpful interpretive classifications, especially for comparative studies. On the other hand, any interpretive category of this type runs the risk of distracting us from the day-to-day religious world of the Roman games, which the scholars mentioned in this essay have done much to illuminate. This world was a vital one, filled with gods and devotions – not to mention curses and the spirits of the dead. It is these elements that supply concrete evidence for an assessment of the religiosity of the games. The final section of this essay, then, provides the reader with an introduction to the world of statues, votive altars, and curse tablets that surrounded and pervaded Roman spectacles; it bears repeating that this is an introduction, and the reader is encouraged to explore the evidence further.

Ovid, in the *Amores*, gives a lively description of the procession of divine statues during the opening parade at the circus:

First comes Victory with her wings outstretched; be near, goddess, and make my love conquer! Cheer for Neptune, you who trust too much in the waves! The sea has nothing for me, I'll stick to my land. Cheer for your Mars, soldier! I hate warfare. It's peace that I like and the love that is found in the midst of peace. Let Phoebus aid the augurs, Phoebe the hunters! Minerva, stir up the hands of the craftsmen! You farmers, rise for Ceres and tender Bacchus! Let the boxers appease Pollux, the horseman Castor! I cheer for you, sweet Venus, and your children adept at the bow. (3.2.45–56)

The historian Dionysius of Halicarnassos (7.72) notes the vast array of figures carried in this kind of procession: statues of the 12 Olympians and their mythological parents, as well as Nymphs, Muses, and younger gods, and the offspring of divine and mortal union, such as

Hercules or the Dioscuri. Julius Caesar even included a statue of himself in the procession – one of the many acts of self-aggrandizement that provoked his assassination (Dio Cassius 43.45.2; Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 76.1; Valerius Maximus 1.6.13). The figures of the gods, dressed with their *exuviae* (robes, distinguishing attributes, and perhaps masks) were carried in stretchers and carriages to the *pulvinar*, a wooden platform converted by Augustus into a stone shrine with couches. From here, the gods presided and watched over the races (Humphrey 1986: 78).

From an architectural standpoint, the Circus Maximus was like a massive shrine to the gods. The principal gods of the circus were Consus, god of the stored harvest, and Sol, the sun god. An underground altar was dedicated to Consus at the southeast end of the circus; it was later moved beneath the platform of the southeast turning post (Humphrey 1986: 258–9). The altar was uncovered for sacrifices to Consus during the Consualia, festivals with horse racing that marked the sowing of the fields in August and the end of the harvest in December (Scullard 1981: 177–8, 205). The horses that sped over Consus's altar were themselves chthonic creatures in Roman eyes. They were born, according to myth, from the earth, and their prowess on the track was, since the institution of the *equirria* festival, symbolically linked to a fertile harvest (Harmon 1988: 248).

If the circus summoned the chthonic power of the harvest and granary, it also called down the heavenly power of the sun (Sol). An open-air temple to the sun and moon, originally situated outside the Circus Maximus on the lower slopes of the Aventine hill, was, by the time of the emperor Trajan, rebuilt directly in front of the finishing line for the races. According to literary sources, the circus as a whole was consecrated to the sun, which symbolized the supreme, victorious charioteer. Sol's honor was magnified when Augustus dedicated an Egyptian obelisk to the sun in the middle of the central barrier, around which the chariots, like heavenly bodies, revolved (Humphrey 1986: 91–5, 269–72).

In addition to Consus and Sol, the Circus Maximus contained altars or statues dedicated to several other gods: inter alia, Kybele; the goddess Victory; Jupiter; Saturn; Mars; the early Italic agricultural gods Seia, Messia, and Tutilina; and the obscure goddess Murcia, who was associated with myrtle groves. Even the lap-counting devices in the central barrier recalled the gods. The dolphin statues that were turned with each lap were sacred to Neptune, who as lord of horses (Neptunus Equester) was associated with the circus in literary sources. The eggs in the central barrier, which were raised or lowered with each lap, may have symbolized Castor and Pollux, twins born from an egg who were gods of horsemen and patrons of Rome's equestrian

order (the *equites*) (Humphrey 1986: 259–65).

In Roman amphitheaters such as the Colosseum, however, the preeminent god was Nemesis, dispenser of justice and fortune. Literary sources tend to associate Mars, as god of war, with gladiatorial combat, but it is Nemesis who appears most frequently in the architectural and epigraphic evidence relevant to the arena. A shrine dedicated to Nemesis (*Nemeseum*) was a common feature of amphitheaters, usually found near the seating reserved for the organizers of games. In these cases, the *Nemeseum* may have served as the end point of the ritual procession that inaugurated the games (Futrell 1997: 116–17). In addition, Roman arenas housed statues and altars to Nemesis, dedicated by individual worshippers in fulfillment of a vow, as the result of a dream or vision, or in promotion of a stated petition.

Historians have puzzled over the role of Nemesis in the amphitheater. Nemesis was identified with Diana, goddess of the hunt and patron of the arena's beast hunters, but this identification appears to have been the result rather than the cause of Nemesis's presence in the amphitheater (Hornum 1993: 80–1). The name Nemesis derives from the Greek word *nemo*, to allot or distribute. Early scholarship saw Nemesis as the goddess who allotted victory and defeat in the games and punished competitors who were overconfident. This theory, while helpful, does not account for Nemesis's particular role in the arena, as opposed to other competitive settings. Moreover, the greatest number of dedications to Nemesis came not from combatants in the arena but from public officials and soldiers. The purpose of the offerings varied and often had little to do with the games themselves (Hornum 1993: 70–9). Recent explanations of Nemesis's importance for the amphitheater rely on the role of Nemesis as a figure of imperial justice in the religious and political propaganda of the Early Empire (Futrell 1997: 110–19). One theory calls attention to the amphitheater as a place where the Empire asserted its authority over its enemies, be they criminals, prisoners of war, or untamed beasts. The amphitheater was, in this view, a *locus* for the "manifestation" of the power of Nemesis, who oversaw imperial justice and upheld imperial order (Hornum 1993: 78–88).

What of the competitors themselves? Did they have particular devotions or divine patrons? This question has been asked especially of combatants who faced death in the amphitheater – gladiators and animal hunters (cf. Ville 1981: 332). Some clues can be gleaned from votive and funerary inscriptions. However, such inscriptions are typically short, follow set conventions, and, in the case of funerary epigraphs, may reveal less about the deceased than about those who commissioned the tomb (Hope 2000: 94). The reason why a certain

god was chosen as a patron varied. A gladiator at Pompeii vowed to give his shield to Venus if he proved victorious in combat. Venus is identified in the inscription with the goddess Fortuna, but her presence here is most likely due to her role as patron of the city of Pompeii (*CIL* 4.2483; cf. Ville 1981: 332). It remains unclear why Silvanus, a god of vegetation, became the patron of a funerary *collegium* of gladiators at Rome (*CIL* 6.631–2). In other cases, the link between combatant and god seems more obvious. Several inscriptions attest to votive offerings made by beast hunters to Diana, goddess of the hunt. Other sources record gladiators and beast hunters devoting their arms to Hercules, the model fighter and victor over death and nature (Le Glay 1990: 218–19).

Not surprisingly, several sources indicate offerings given by combatants to Nemesis. The relief on an altar dedicated by beast hunters at Teurnia, in what is now Austria, states that the altar belongs to Nemesis Augusta (*CIL* 3.4738; Hornum 1993: 70). Likewise, the ex-voto of a gladiator at Tarragona (Tarraco), in what is now Spain, is dedicated to Sancta Augusta Nemesis. Other epithets of Nemesis on offerings include Queen (*regina*), Conqueror (*victrix*), and Unconquered (*invicta*) (Le Glay 1990: 220). Such epithets reflect the connection between Nemesis and imperial power and lend credence to the opinion that combatants petitioned Nemesis because her power was “manifest” in the arena. Yet this does not exclude the possibility that Nemesis was invoked with the aim of securing fortune in combat. Inscriptions are inherently minimalistic and reveal only certain aspects of a religious life that, in its totality, is unrecoverable.

That said, we can point to certain dominant features of religion in the amphitheater. Interaction between gods and humans (whether combatants, spectators, or organizers) was a process of mutual exchange, even mutual obligation. This exchange could take a variety of forms. In some cases, offerings were inscribed with a stated petition, such as “*pro salute*,” for the health of the dedicator or his family. In such cases, the worshipper no doubt felt that his offering could induce, or perhaps even compel, the god to answer his request. In other cases it was the god who did the compelling. Several dedications to Nemesis, for example, are inscribed “*ex visu*” (from a vision) or “*ex iussu*” (from a command). In these examples, it seems that either an oracle or the appearance of the god in a dream had commanded the worshipper to make an offering (Hornum 1993: 75–6). The most common type of dedication, however, was that which fulfilled a vow (*ex voto*, *votum solvere*, *votum demittere*, etc.). Here, as with the *ludi votivi*, veneration of the god was retroactive payment for divine aid. If the god responded to the vow, then the worshipper would make the promised offering. The gods did not, however, always

maintain their end of the bargain. One epigraph, composed by the wife of a gladiator who died in combat, reads, “Do not put faith in Nemesis. Thus was I deceived” (“*In Nemese ne fidem habeatis. Sic sum deceptus*” CIL 5.3466). One wonders what Nemesis had done to break this *fides*: was it perhaps the god’s failure to answer a vow?

Unlike trained gladiators or animal fighters, those condemned to death in the arena (the *noxii*) had little to hope for from the gods except a speedy death. (For further discussion of public executions in Rome, see Chapter 35.) But for Christians, at least, death in the arena was the gateway to the resurrected life, a “baptism of blood,” in imitation of Christ’s crucifixion. Christian accounts emphasize the joy of the martyrs and their sublime control over their fate. In the *Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*, the pregnant Felicity is afraid that her martyrdom will be postponed, since it was illegal to punish a pregnant woman in public. In answer to her prayers, however, she gives birth before the scheduled martyrdom, in her eighth month of gestation (15.2). Like Christ in the Gospel of John, the martyrs control every aspect of their death. Perpetua even draws the gladiator’s sword to her neck with her own hand (21.9-10). Her martyrdom becomes an act of her will, an imitation of Christ that is her hour of glory (20.5). (For further discussion of Christian martyrdom in the arena, see Chapter 39 as well as Shaw 1993 and 1996.)

A more quotidian aspect of religious practice at the games has been revealed by finds of curse tables inscribed with binding spells (*defixiones*).⁷ *Defixiones* were used for various purposes, from ensnaring a lover to rendering a prosecutor speechless in court (Gager 1992: 78–150). Within the context of the games, curse tablets were employed primarily by competitors and spectators in the circus in order to incapacitate horses and drivers. However, arena fighters were also the victims of *defixiones*. One curse tablet found by an amphitheater in Carthage mentions a beast hunter named Gallicus and requests, “May he be injured, killed, wiped out!” (Le Glay 1990: 222).

Defixiones were commissioned from a professional magician, who inscribed them on a thin tablet, usually made of lead. The curses functioned through the power of various *daimones*, typically gods associated with the underworld (of which there were many) or the spirits of the dead. The curse was composed of formulaic injunctions, many of which included direct appeal to a god. In other cases, the magician likely summoned the god through oral incantation (Gager 1992: 13). In addition, curse tablets were buried near locations such as cemeteries, fountains, or drainage pipes, where they would have the best access to underworld spirits. Even in Roman cities, curses were often written in Greek and employed *voces mysticae* – strings of letters or words, imbued with magical potency, whose meaning was

only recognizable to the inscriber.

A typical curse tablet, found at Rome, asks the goddess Phydria and the nymphs Aidonai to “bind” (*katecho*) the horses of the Green faction, named as Iudex, Heliodromus, Sol, Hipponikos, and so on. Specifically, the curse asks that the horses be rendered lame, powerless, and helpless (*apodos, adunamos, aboethetos*). This petition is followed by a sequence of magical words: *Menebainchuch Bainchuch Bachuch Bachuch Bachaxichuch Badeintophoth Phthosisiro*. The curse then requests that the goddess bind the drivers of the Green faction, identifying each driver by his own name as well as the name of his mother. Just like their horses, the drivers are to be rendered powerless, helpless, and without the use of their legs (Tremel 2004: 185–8). (For further discussion of factions and chariot racing, see Chapter 33.)

Defixiones were short-range weapons, and location was the key to their success. In addition to requiring access to the underworld spirits, curse tablets needed to be deposited near the site of their intended target. Thus magicians often tried to bury *defixiones* in graves near a circus – a task facilitated by the fact that cemeteries and circuses were often located on the edge of town. At Carthage, for example, a large number of curses have been found buried in a cemetery roughly 500 meters from the circus. Another common tactic was to bury *defixiones* by the starting gates (*carceres*) or the turning posts (*metae*) of the track. The start and the turns were the two most dangerous parts of the race and had the most effect on its outcome. Horses waiting at the start often reared up or bit each other and collided into one another coming out of the gate. Similarly, high speed turns around the *metae* required great skill and were prone to accidents. Race officials, as well as competitors and spectators, could take countermeasures to protect the races from *defixiones* (Heintz 1998: 337–42). Jerome relates the use of consecrated water sprinkled onto the starting gates to protect them from spells (Jerome *Life of Hilarion* 20, *Patrologia Latina* 23.38). A Jewish magical book from the same period describes victory charms that could be inscribed on silver tablets in order to counter the curses inscribed on lead tablets (*Sepher ha-Razim*, Gager 1992: 59; cf. Heintz 1998: 340).

Curse tablets were an enduring and pervasive aspect of Roman religion. Their use was not limited to the poor and desperate, and belief in their effectiveness was widespread, surviving at least until the eighth century CE – that is, well into the Christian era (Gager 1992: 27, 44–6). Pliny the Elder (writing in the first century CE) declared that “there is no one who does not fear being bound [*defigi*] by awful spells” (*Natural History* 28.4). Nevertheless, curse tablets are often – and with reason – considered an underground phenomenon.

Buried in cemeteries or under the sands of the circus, they remained hidden from political and religious authorities. Moreover, they did not, for the most part, address the gods officially celebrated at the games, such as Consus, Sol, and Nemesis.⁸ Despite this, one cannot expel *defixiones* from religion to the shadowy realm of magic. The same spectators and competitors (at least as a collective) who petitioned the gods of the sky, of the harvest, and of justice through vows and offerings also sought the aid of underworld *daimones* through curse tablets. Even more to the point, the gods summoned on *defixiones* were not only the shades of the dead, but also such established gods of state cult as Jupiter and Mercury (Gager 1992: 12).

In the circus and arena, all the worlds of Rome – visible and invisible, celestial and chthonic – came together. It is above all in the meeting of these worlds, manifest in such quotidian things as vows, processions, and curses, that one can seek the religious meaning of Roman spectacle.

ABBREVIATIONS

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

NOTES

¹ The view goes back to Mommsen, 1864–79: vol. 2: 42–57.

² Much energy has been expended in trying to determine whether it was the Etruscans (to the North) or the Osco-Samnites (to the South) who introduced gladiatorial fighting to the Romans (Ville 1981: 1–8). The debate remains unresolved, but the balance of opinion seems to be inclined toward the Osco-Samnites. See, for example, Dunkle 2008: 10–13 and Potter 2010: 329.

³ When the emperors assumed a monopoly on the provision of gladiatorial games, the line between public and private became blurred. Even in the beginning, however, the line was not so clear as it may seem. During the Republican period, gladiatorial games usually took place in the public forum. As Wiedemann (1992: 5) rightly points out, the purpose of gladiatorial fighting was to turn the private funeral into a public display.

⁴ Politically ambitious Romans typically held a succession of offices, serving as quaestor, then aedile, then praetor, before seeking election to the consulship, the most important political position in the Republic. As Epplert points out in his essay on beast hunts in this volume (Chapter 34), Sulla claimed to have lost his

initial bid for the praetorship because of the public's wish that he first serve a term as aedile and thereby have to provide a magnificent beast hunt for them (Plutarch *Sulla* 5).

5 All translations of Latin texts presented in this essay were produced by J. Zaleski.

6 Beard 1992: 739–42, for example, argues that a certain form of what moderns call “abuse” was a traditional and accepted feature of Roman religion.

7 *Defixio* (from *de-figere*) is the equivalent of the Greek *katadesmos* (from *kata-dein*). The word seems to have referred originally to the way in which these curse tablets would be bound up in a roll or fixed down with a nail; however, the word also reflects the common function of curses to “bind” one’s adversary (Gager 1992: 30).

8 One curse tablet addressed to Nemesis has been found near the military amphitheater in Caerlon, Wales (Hornum 1993: 169–70).

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

There are a number of good, relatively concise volumes that offer introductions to Roman religion; see, for instance, Rüpke 2007 (2001). Rüpke also edited a useful collection of essays on Roman religion (Rüpke 2007). A stimulating, relatively dense survey of Roman religion can be found in Beard, North, and Price 1998, the second volume of which contains an invaluable collection of original sources in translation.

Bernstein has in recent years published extensively on Roman *ludi*; his work includes a book-length survey of the subject (1998) and studies of particular issues (1997, 1999). He has also written a useful overview of *ludi* in Republican Rome (2007). As a reference book for the Republican period, Scullard 1981, which proceeds through the Roman calendar, describing the festivals and games of each month, remains indispensable. Versnel 1970 remains an authoritative work on the religious significance of early Roman triumphs and *ludi*. Note, however, the criticism of Beard 2007, which places records of early triumphs in their contemporary literary context. Harmon 1988 analyzes the link between horse-racing festivals and worship of

chthonic deities, from Greek and Etruscan origins through the Early Empire. Humphrey 1986 provides detailed analysis of the religious architecture of the Circus Maximus and other circuses.

On religious aspects of gladiatorial games, Ville 1981 remains invaluable both for its assessment of the secularization of *munera* and for its discussion of gladiatorial devotions. Le Glay 1990 provides a detailed collection of votive and epigraphic evidence concerning gladiatorial worship. Futrell 1997 is also very helpful; in addition to the more controversial discussion of gladiatorial combats, chapters on *munera* and the imperial cult, Celtic religion, and the cult of Nemesis are excellent. Wiedemann 1992 also presents a useful mine for sources, as well as a provocative take on the meaning of gladiatorial combat in pagan and Christian eyes. The analysis by Hornum 1993 of the cult of Nemesis is highly illuminating and supplies an extensive catalog of offerings to Nemesis.

For *defixiones* in general, Gager 1992 is very useful and provides numerous examples of curse tablets in the appendix to each chapter; it also contains a chapter on curses in the circus, based on Gager 1990. Heintz 1998 explores the importance of burial location for circus curses. A recent monograph in German, Tremel 2004, is devoted to curse tablets from amphitheaters, circuses, and Greek stadia, and includes transcriptions and German translations of 100 *defixiones*.

CHAPTER 41

Ancient Critics of Roman Spectacle and Sport

Kathryn Mammel

1 Introduction

The violence of the most infamous Roman spectacles – the gladiatorial games (*munera*), beast hunts (*venationes*), and public executions in the arena – seems brutal, even barbarous, by modern standards.¹ How, we wonder, could Romans tolerate such savagery? Was there no opposition to such spectacles in Roman society? This essay will show that there was in fact criticism, but it was neither powerful nor pervasive.

Archaeological and literary evidence indicates widespread support for spectacles among Romans, especially among the masses but also among the elite. Romans conceived of their violent spectacles not as butchery or cruelty but as performances by skilled and trained entertainers that validated the militarism and machismo of the Roman military state (Kyle 2007: 270). As Garrett Fagan argues in his essay in this volume, Chapter 31, violent spectacles engaged their audiences in a “dynamic psychological and emotional experience,” and the action in the arena likely held for its Roman spectators some of the same allure that today’s sporting events hold for modern audiences. Furthermore, spectacles offered the Roman masses a chance to escape from abysmal living conditions, to interact with the emperor, and to view exotic sights (Kyle 2007: 300–1). For the Roman elite, they also offered an opportunity to appease and control the masses and maintain the political and social status quo (Flower 2004b; Wistrand 1992: 64–6). In short, for most Romans there was a lot to like about spectacles, and opposition was by no means the norm.

Even when Romans did voice objections to spectacles, they were not the sort of objections that modern readers might expect. In fact, among those who expressed disapproval, the games and spectacles of the arena were generally viewed in a more positive light than other forms of entertainment largely because the violence they put on display was understood to carry symbolic significance and educational value (Wistrand 1992: 56). While Romans had great contempt for gladiators, they nevertheless praised the example gladiators set for spectators by means of their deaths in *munera*: if a lowly, despicable gladiator could display *virtus* (manliness) in the form of strength, bravery, discipline, endurance, love of glory, and contempt for death, surely self-respecting Romans could be expected to follow their example and display *virtus* themselves (Pliny *Panegyric* 33.1; Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 2.41; Wistrand 1992: 56, 77). Even those who opposed certain aspects of spectacles had few qualms concerning public executions in the arena. Most Roman authors felt criminals deserved death, and executions, like the violent execution of informers detailed by Pliny (*Panegyric* 34.3), could set an example for the audience. Opposition was voiced only rarely, when critics perceived that public executions failed in setting a proper example.²

Similarly, the Roman literary record is largely lacking in serious objections to the slaughter of animals in the arena. Although a few accounts detail the crowd's outpouring of sympathy for the elephants that were killed in spectacles arranged by Pompey in 55 BCE (e.g., Cicero *Letters to His Friends* 7.1.3; Pliny *Natural History* 8.20–1), Jo-Ann Shelton has argued persuasively that this outpouring was motivated by highly unusual circumstances and that the authors who recount this event had their own, anti-Pompeian motives for doing so. Under normal circumstances, Roman spectators objectified animals rather than sympathizing with them and had no moral reservations about causing them harm (Shelton 1999: 245 and *passim*).

If Romans did not voice serious objections to the brutality of the most violent Roman games, what then were the major objections to spectacles, and what motivations lay behind those objections? Within pagan Roman society, the nature of the opposition raised against spectacles depended both on the nature or “style” of the spectacles in question – whether they were traditional, Roman-style spectacles or Greek-style athletic spectacles – and on the identity of the individual voicing the opposition. Pagan opposition to traditional, Roman-style spectacles of the circus, the theater, and the amphitheater came almost exclusively from a small group of elite (and elitist) literary and philosophical figures who did not share the views of either the masses or most elite Romans. These figures voiced selective and qualified opposition only to certain aspects of the Roman spectacles; they

expressed no desire to abolish Roman spectacle culture, and most were not above attending or even sponsoring spectacles.

Greek-style athletic games and training, however, as a relatively late addition to Roman spectacle culture and daily life, elicited more widespread objections of a rather different nature. Members of the Roman elite who were motivated by moral concerns and chauvinism, doctors who were motivated by medical concerns, and intellectuals who were motivated by fears about the neglect of the mind and soul that excessive physical training could cause, all raised a variety of objections specifically aimed at Greek-style athletics in Roman contexts.

However, not everyone living in the Roman world identified with the pagan Roman culture in which spectacles played such a central role. Two groups, Jews and Christians, voiced opposition to spectacles that was much more vehement and aimed at all forms of pagan spectacles – Roman-style and Greek-style, violent, and otherwise. Confronted by the spectacles imported into Jerusalem by Herod in the first century BCE, Jews opposed them as an affront to their ancestral morality and religious traditions, and they lamented the effects these spectacles had on Jewish culture. Early Christian authors voiced objections that were similar but even more numerous and widespread: they viewed all pagan spectacles as antithetical to Christian beliefs and practices and decried the corrupting effects of sinful spectacles on Christian spectators.

For all of these groups, opposition was not merely about criticizing the negative aspects of these spectacles but was also closely tied to processes of self-presentation and identity formation. Just as Roman spectacle culture itself played a key role in the formation of many aspects of Roman identity for Roman society as a whole, opposition to spectacles provided a means of group and individual self-fashioning. In denouncing spectacles in their various forms, critics were able to define and position themselves in relation to various spectacle-loving “others.” For elitist Roman literary figures, including the Stoics, the “other” meant the uneducated, unphilosophical masses; for Romans opposed to Greek athletics, it meant effeminate and immoral Greeks or athletes and their trainers who jeopardized their own physical and spiritual well-being through athletic training; for Jews and early Christian authors, it meant corrupt pagans who did not share their religious identities or their codes of morality.

The purpose of this essay is to identify and contextualize the major objections raised by each of these groups within pagan Roman, Jewish, and Christian culture. This essay will also explore the different ways that the objections of each group functioned in rhetorical strategies of self-presentation, allowing ancient critics to negotiate

their group and individual identities through their opposition to Roman spectacle culture.

2 Roman Objections to Roman-Style Spectacles: Opposition from the Literary Elite and the Stoics

Many of the literary elite's objections to popular, Roman-style spectacles were motivated in large part by elitism and intellectual snobbery. Numerous Roman writers associated spectacles with the *vulgus*, or the common masses, and expressed (and perhaps sometimes feigned) disdain for or disinterest in these spectacles as a means of distinguishing themselves from the commoners who appreciated them (Wiedemann 1992: 141–4; Wistrand 1992: 62). These writers were primarily concerned with showing that the obsessions of the masses were, first, not obsessions that they themselves shared and, second, not appropriate for intelligent and educated Roman citizens. Writers such as Cicero (106–43 BCE), Pliny the Younger (c.61–c.112 CE), and Marcus Aurelius (121–80 CE) claimed that spectacles were repetitive and boring. As Pliny saw it, the circus spectacles “have no novelty, no variation, nothing for which one viewing would not suffice,” and, similarly, according to Cicero, “if you’ve seen one *venatio*, you’ve seen them all” (Pliny *Letters* 9.6, trans. P. Walsh; Cicero *Letters to His Friends* 7.1, trans. A. Mahoney; see also, Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* 6.46). Furthermore, according to Pliny, the spectacles of the theater and the circus lacked the *severitas* (severity) and *gravitas* (seriousness) befitting men of higher social standing (Pliny *Letters* 9.6, *Panegyric* 46.4–6; Wistrand 1992: 30–2, 43–4). For Suetonius and Tacitus, the very idea that an elite Roman – or, worst of all, an emperor – might do more than simply attend such spectacles and actually participate in them was deeply degrading and worthy of contempt (Suetonius *Tiberius* 35.2, *Caligula* 54.1; Tacitus *Annals* 14.14–15; Edwards 1997).

Many members of the Roman literary elite agreed that men of elevated standing should spend their leisure time – or at least most of it – engaged in more worthwhile activities than attending spectacles. Such activities ranged from philosophical and literary endeavors for Cicero, Seneca the Younger (1 BCE–65 CE), and Pliny to sunbathing for Juvenal (55–127 CE) (Cicero *Letters to His Friends* 7.1; Seneca

Letters from a Stoic 83.7; Pliny *Letters* 9.6; Juvenal *Satires* 11.204; Wistrand 1992: 44–5). For these figures, spectacles were objectionable because men from among the elite could become too caught up in the trifling pastimes of the masses and neglect more appropriate and worthwhile pursuits. Tacitus laments that in their craze for gladiators, horses, and actors, Roman men neglected the study of the liberal arts (*Dialogue on Orators* 29.3; Wistrand 1992: 43), a sentiment repeatedly expressed by Seneca as well (e.g., *Natural Questions* 7.32.3–4). Voicing a related concern, Juvenal and Martial both bemoan a society that neglected not only the liberal arts, but also men who excelled in the liberal arts (such as themselves), rewarding successful charioteers and athletes with wealth and fame while leaving poets and men of learning to toil in relative poverty and obscurity (Juvenal *Satires* 7.106–14; Martial *Epigrams* 10.74; Wistrand 1992: 45).

In addition to sharing these more general concerns of the literary elite, the Roman Stoics (again, a particular subset of the literary elite) also voiced a set of specific objections to spectacles that were rooted in Stoic notions concerning emotion, rationality, pleasure, and virtue. Stoics believed that man should be governed by reason rather than by baser, animalistic emotions, and that pleasures (*voluptates*) must be enjoyed in moderation so as not to make a man soft and feeble (Wistrand 1992: 12). Spectacles were dangerous because they constituted a form of pleasure that appealed to the baser emotions and instincts of the spectacle-goer, potentially corrupting him and distracting his attention from more lofty, rational pursuits (Wiedemann 1992: 142–3). Spectacles could be enjoyed in moderation, and they could even provide occasional respite from the more serious pursuits of the mind, but they were not without risk for the philosophically inclined Roman man.

According to Seneca, who expressed the Stoic position on spectacles most clearly, the crowds that gathered at spectacles were the most dangerous and objectionable element of spectacles for a Stoic; crowds had the power to corrupt a wise man who was striving to live virtuously because they stirred up his emotions and caused him to “relapse” into his former, vicious condition (*Letters from a Stoic* 7.1). For Seneca, “to consort with the crowd is harmful; there is no person who does not make some vice attractive to us or stamp it upon us, or taint us unconsciously therewith . . . the greater the mob with which we mingle, the greater the danger” (*Letters from a Stoic* 7.2, trans. R. Gummere). At spectacles, where crowds were particularly large and where idle pleasure was added into the equation, the danger was greatest: “Nothing is so damaging to good character as the habit of lounging at the games; for then it is that vice steals subtly upon one through the avenue of pleasure. . . . I come home more greedy, more

ambitious, more voluptuous, and even more cruel and inhuman for having been among human beings” (7.2–3). Spectacles were thus particularly dangerous because they were peopled by “a crowd that was so unlike” Seneca and the philosophical elite he represented as to undermine the values and mindset that were central to a Stoic’s identity (7.6).

For the Roman literary elite generally and the Stoics specifically, opposition to spectacles was thus about defining and defending one’s elite and philosophical identity in relation to popular culture and the pastimes of the masses. The opposition of the literary and philosophical elite did not constitute a wholesale rejection of traditional Roman-style spectacles. Rather, elite opposition was a reaction to the popularity of spectacles and, for the Stoics, a statement of the perceived threat that such popular entertainment posed to one’s philosophical well-being.

3 Roman Objections to Greek-Style Athletics in Roman Contexts: Opposition from Elite Romans, Doctors, and Intellectuals

While most Romans voiced no criticism of more traditional, Roman-style spectacles, the same cannot be said of Greek-style athletic games and training. Greek-style athletics were gradually adopted and adapted in Rome beginning as early as the second century BCE, but they did not become a permanent fixture in Roman spectacle culture until the middle of the first century CE (Newby 2005: 24–5; see also Chapter 36). As athletics came to occupy an increasingly prominent place in Roman life, three major forms of opposition arose: members of the elite classes of Roman society criticized athletics on chauvinistic and moral grounds, doctors such as Galen objected to the physical effects of athletics on the body, and intellectuals and philosophers voiced concerns about the effects of excessive athletic training on the mind and the soul.

By far the most widespread form of opposition to Greek athletics in Roman contexts was that of elite Romans concerned with defining “Romanness” as separate and distinct from “Greekness” – a process

that was neither straightforward nor simple (König 2005: 213; Rawson 1989). As both König and Newby discuss in their treatments of Roman responses to Greek athletics, the gradual adoption of Greek athletics occurred within the larger tradition of selective adoption and adaptation of elements of Greek culture – including philosophy, literature, art, and architecture – as part of appropriate and expected elite Roman behavior (König 2005: 206–7; Newby 2005: 3–7). For members of elite Roman culture, Hellenism in itself was not objectionable, but excessive or inappropriate Hellenism was (Newby 2005: 3). For many, the adoption of Greek athletics as a new, increasingly permanent fixture in Roman spectacle culture constituted a form of excessive, inappropriate, and morally dangerous Hellenism.

The members of the Roman elite who criticized Greek athletics on moral grounds voiced a list of standard objections that served as “highly charged starting points for defining *and* (in some cases) questioning the proper composition of elite Roman culture” (König 2005: 211). These objections were rooted in the idea that Greek-style athletic training exposed participants to the more deplorable elements of Greek culture: public nudity, pederasty, effeminacy, luxury, and degeneracy. The public nudity that Greek athletic training entailed was a particular source of anxiety for Romans; for many, it carried associations with (and the potential to incite) pederasty and homosexuality, and it represented moral decadence that was incompatible with traditional Roman values (Tacitus *Annals* 14.20–1; Mann 2002). As Cicero famously notes, citing the Roman epic poet Ennius (c.239–169 BCE), “to strip in public is the beginning of evil-doing” (*Tusculan Disputations* 4.33.70, trans. H. Harris).

Some Roman elites expressed concerns that athletic training drew Romans away from more traditional and worthwhile pursuits. The perceived irrelevance of athletics to military training was a particular preoccupation for Romans, as illustrated, for example, by Lucan’s lament that in hanging around wrestling grounds, Roman youth had become unfit to carry arms (*The Civil War* 7.270–2). Similarly, Martial speaks to concerns about athletic training distracting Romans from other serious and traditional interests such as agriculture in his suggestion that digging in the vineyard was a more practical way of passing the time than lifting barbells (*Epigrams* 14.49). While no evidence exists to indicate that Greek athletics in fact led to the moral and social degeneration that Romans feared, these literary commonplaces (*topoi*) of Romanness versus Greekness, Roman *virtus* versus Greek nudity and effeminacy, military training versus athletics, and practical utility versus luxury pervade Roman writings on Greek athletics. Indeed, they were central to elite Roman strategies of defining Roman values against the perceived threat of moral

degeneration posed by Greek athletics (Mann 2002).

Beyond these moral and cultural objections, there existed a second, very different tradition of opposition to Greek athletics from within Roman society, one rooted in concerns over the injurious effects of excessive exercise on the body. No one articulates these concerns more passionately and graphically – or with greater motives of self-promotion and professional self-definition – than Galen, a doctor and prolific writer who lived in Rome in the second century CE. Throughout his writings related to physical training, Galen rails against the imbalanced and immoderate exercise regimens that were foolishly advised by *paidotribai*, or professional athletic trainers, with whom Galen and other ancient doctors were in competition. By reacting to the practices and ill effects of athletic training, Galen defined his own approach to bodily regimen, showcased his medical expertise, and championed the supremacy of the medical arts over the false arts of athletic trainers (König 2005: 256).

As Galen saw it, not all forms of exercise were bad; the types of exercises that doctors advised – practical, philosophically grounded exercises that stimulated the mind and all the muscles evenly, such as exercises with a small ball – were quite good (Scarborough 1985: 171–2; König 2005: 285–6). However, any exercise that worked the body excessively or in an uneven, imbalanced way – such as the exercises that foolish *paidotribai* recommended – could be devastating to the body. Improper training subjected the body to abuse, which according to König's reading of Galen's *Good Condition*, “almost literally rips its [the body's] internal organs apart” (2005: 283).

The heavy caloric intake that athletic training necessitated was also said to endanger the body, causing the veins to overfill with blood and putting the body at risk of losing its innate heat (König 2005: 283). According to Galen, the type of peak condition that athletic trainers encouraged was no “genuine good condition” at all, and the stress that the athletic body endured in attempting to achieve athletic peak condition made the body like a wall weakened by so many siege engines that it collapsed under the slightest pressure (*Exhortation to Study the Arts* 11). In Galen's words, “As far as bodily health is concerned . . . it is clear that no other group of people is more miserable than athletes” (*Exhortation to Study the Arts* 11, trans. König 2005: 296).

Galen's concerns about the devastating physical effects of regular athletic training on the body overlapped and engaged with a third tradition of Roman opposition to Greek athletics that was rooted in the claims of Roman intellectuals and Stoics like Cicero and Seneca that excessive athletic training led to the neglect of the mind and the soul. For Cicero and Seneca these concerns about athletic training

functioned within a more general and long-established tradition privileging the pursuit of wisdom and the intellectual arts over the physical arts (Newby 2005: 38). Neither figure opposed certain types of athletic training in moderation, and both even drew metaphors from the stadium in making philosophical arguments. However, both Seneca and Cicero opposed athletic training that caused individuals to prioritize exercise and preservation of the body over exercise of the mind and preservation of the soul (Seneca *Letters from a Stoic* 15.2–6; Crowther 2004: 387–401). As Galen saw it, professional athletes and their professional trainers were guilty of precisely this: “They do not even know that they have a soul in the first place . . . For they are so busy accumulating a mass of flesh and blood that their soul is extinguished as if beneath a heap of filth, and they are incapable of thinking about anything clearly; instead they become mindless like the irrational animals” (*Exhortation to Study the Arts* 11, trans. König 2005: 296).

For Galen, as for Seneca, Cicero, and other Roman intellectuals, objections to the neglect of the mind and the soul because of athletic training carried implicit assertions of philosophical and intellectual superiority over those who did not share these concerns. Like the standard elite moral concerns and the physically grounded medical concerns, these too functioned in strategies of self-definition and self-positioning.

4 Jewish Objections to Sport and Spectacle in the Roman World

Elite Romans resisting the adoption of Greek-style athletic games and training in the Roman world were not the only group to voice moral and cultural objections to spectacles. For some cultural and religious groups within the Roman world who did not identify with pagan Roman culture, all pagan spectacles, regardless of their “style” and their level of violence, were objectionable on both moral and cultural grounds. According to the writings of the first-century CE Roman-Jewish historian Josephus this was particularly true among Jews confronted with the Roman- and Greek-style spectacles imported into Jerusalem by Herod in the first century BCE (Weiss 1999).

In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus highlights several Jewish objections to the spectacles instituted by Herod, each of which was rooted in concerns that foreign spectacles posed a threat to Jewish culture, tradition, and morality. Josephus claims that spectacles

caused men to neglect “those religious observances which used to lead the multitude to piety,” making the Jews “guilty of great wickedness.” Herod’s elaborate *venationes* and executions were seen as “a dissolution of those customs for which they had so great a veneration.” According to Josephus it was “an instance of barefaced impiety, to throw men to wild beasts, for . . . affording delight to the spectators,” but it was “an instance of no less impiety” for Jews to abandon traditional Jewish law to allow for such foreign practices (15.8.1, trans. W. Whitson). Further, Jews perceived the trophies that were hung in the theater to commemorate Augustus’s victories as forms of idols, and because idolatry was fundamentally at odds with Jewish law and religious practice, spectacles were found to be particularly reprehensible. In short, according to Josephus, Roman spectacles presented an affront to the traditions and ancestral morality of the Jews that were central to their cultural identity; opposition to spectacles was thus a means of defending and defining Jewish identity against pernicious foreign influences. (For further discussion of Jewish responses to Roman sport and spectacle, see Chapter 39.)

5 Christian Objections to Sport and Spectacle in the Roman World

Similar but more numerous and widespread objections to pagan spectacles were voiced by early Christian authors. These objections often took the form of a long and rather standardized list of reasons for which Roman spectacle culture was inconsistent with Christian beliefs, practices, and, by extension, identity.

At the top of this list was the idea that Roman spectacles were “idolatry, pure and simple” that could defile the Christian spectator and turn his mind from God. In his treatise against Roman spectacle culture, *On Spectacles*, the Christian apologist Tertullian (c.160–c.220 CE) argues that practically every aspect of spectacles – from their origins and their names to their equipment and their architectural settings – was idolatrous. Rooted in pagan religious festivals and funeral games (or “worship of the dead”), inspired by demons to lead people astray, staged in structures dedicated to pagan gods, and employing misused elements of God’s creation, spectacles “belong[ed] to the devil, his pomp and his angels” and were thus no place for Christians (*On Spectacles* 4–13, trans. T. Glover). According to a

different treatise of the same name attributed to Novatian (c.200–58 CE), spectacles were particularly dangerous for Christians because they were not merely idolatrous, but deceptive and seductive, disguising their idolatrous elements – which ordinarily would be repulsive to Christians – behind pleasures of the eyes and ears that were attractive to everyone (*On Spectacles* 4).

Betraying the influence of Stoic thought on early Christianity, Christian writers also expressed particular concern over the emotional impact of spectacles and their potential to do violence to the souls of the spectators. Tertullian asserts that “there is no spectacle without violence to the spirit” and argues that the games inspired in the audience “madness, bile, anger, and pain” antithetical to the “tranquility, gentleness, quiet, and peace” with which Christians ought to approach the Holy Spirit (*On Spectacles* 17, 15). In his late fourth-century CE *Confessions*, Augustine presents this spiritual violence even more graphically, arguing that the emotions induced by theatrical spectacles created “inflamed spots, pus, and repulsive sores” on the soul and that in watching the gladiatorial games, a Christian might be “struck in the soul by a wound graver than the gladiator in his body” (*Confessions* 3.10.24, 6.8.13, trans. M. Dods).

A related (and similarly Stoic) concern among Christian writers was that spectacles brought the spectator into contact with crowds of sinners and impious people. Though expressed by several authors, this concern is perhaps most clearly illustrated in Augustine’s account of how his friend Alypius fell prey to the seductions of the gladiatorial games. Augustine relates that, being forced to attend a gladiatorial game, Alypius tried to close his eyes and ignore the tempting spectacle, but “the shouting [of the crowd] entered his ears and forced open his eyes.” Compelled to look upon the violence in the arena by the noise of the crowd, Alypius was immediately transfixed and corrupted, and “thereby it [the noise of the crowd] was the means of wounding and striking to the ground a mind still more bold than strong” (*Confessions* 6.8.13). Seneca’s concern that vices are harder to resist among the crowds at spectacles (*Letters from a Stoic* 7) seems to resonate in Augustine’s anecdote and in the general concerns among early Christian writers about crowds and their effects.

As if the idolatry, emotional violence, and impious crowds at spectacles were not enough, early Christian authors also feared that spectacles exposed audiences to other egregious sins and vices such as prostitution and adultery. Novatian speaks clearly to this concern in lamenting that even to get to the circus one had to walk through the bad parts of town, “through the brothel, through the naked bodies of prostitutes, through sleazy lust, through public disgrace, through vulgar sensuality, through the reproaches of all right thinking men”

(*On Spectacles* 5.4, trans. C. Francese). Once at their destinations spectators of theatrical spectacles (*ludi scaenici*) even put sin on display. Tatian, writing in the second century, notes that the stage gave “lessons in adultery,” which were learned by the youth (*To the Greeks* 22), and Novatian expresses concern that becoming accustomed to watching something on stage made a spectator more inclined to do it (*On Spectacles* 6.3).

The writings of many early Christian writers also betray misgivings about the violence and bloodshed inherent in arena spectacles – misgivings that are absent in the writings of the Roman literary elite – and demonstrate particular concern with the moral impact of the violence on the viewer and the participants. In the eyes of these Christian writers, the *munera* were not merely a form of entertainment put on by skilled performers, as they were for pagan Roman audiences; instead, they constituted a form of murder. Because some Christians believed “looking on at a murder to be nigh to murder itself” (Athenagoras *Embassy for the Christians* 35, trans. J. Crehan), attending the *munera* was thought to be particularly dangerous, for it not only exposed the spectator to the sin of murder but turned the spectator into a sort of vicarious murderer himself. Worse still, the murderous spectacles forced men who were condemned to the arena for minor crimes to become murderers in the most literal sense (Tertullian *On Spectacles* 19).

Many Christian writers also objected that spectacular executions in the arena were not merely sinful and corrupting, but also pointless and wasteful. Tatian quips that “the robber commits murder for the sake of plunder, but the rich man purchases gladiators for the sake of their being killed” (*To the Greeks* 23, trans. B. Pratten). Similarly, Ambrose, a fourth-century CE bishop of Milan, saw in spectacles both a senseless waste of human life and a misuse of economic resources, which should have been put to more charitable purposes, bettering the lives of men rather than wasting them (*On the Duties of the Clergy* 2.109–10; Bomgardner 2000: 203).

Finally, two other significant and seemingly peculiar critiques of Roman spectacles – that they demonstrated great impiety toward the *pagan* gods and that they involved a form of cannibalism – recur frequently throughout early Christian texts and merit special mention here. While these criticisms may at first seem strange, they can be understood as responses to and inversions of allegations that the Romans leveled against Christians. Because Christians refused to participate in Roman religious life, Romans accused them of impiety. Furthermore, Romans denounced Christians as cannibals as part of a long Roman tradition of ascribing cannibalism to marginal and threatening groups and perhaps also because they misunderstood the

Eucharist, Christians' symbolic consumption of the body and blood of Christ (McGowan 1994).

For early Christian apologists, spectacles provided a convenient and obvious rhetorical pivot point for turning these allegations of impiety and cannibalism back onto the Romans themselves. Tertullian and the third-century CE apologist Minucius Felix observe that while the Romans alleged Christian impiety, they themselves disgraced and violated the majesty of their own gods in theatrical spectacles by attributing vices to the gods, putting these on display, and allowing men – and in the amphitheater even criminals – to play the roles of the gods (Tertullian *Apology* 15; Minucius Felix *Octavius* 32.10). Tertullian's wry remark, "I don't know whether your gods may not have more complaints to make of you than of the Christians," sums up this criticism of pagan impiety succinctly and quite biting (Tertullian *Apology* 15.7, trans. T. Glover). As for allegations of cannibalism, the standard argument made by apologists was that Christians, who (in some ascetic sects) did not even consume animal blood and who could not stand to look upon death in the arena, could not possibly be cannibals. Instead, Roman pagans, who relished human death in the arena and who ate the meat of beasts slain there – "flesh glutted with blood and gorged on the entrails of men" (Minucius Felix *Octavius* 30.6, trans. G. Rendall) – were the true cannibals who partook of a "cannibal banquet of the soul" by attending arena games (Tatian *To the Greeks* 23).

This vehement and widespread opposition to Roman spectacle culture among Christian authors was as much about identity formation as it was about the spectacles themselves. For early Christians, constructing a new religious and cultural identity involved establishing what Christians were and what they were not by defining early Christians against their cultural "others" – a process which played out largely in early Christian written texts (Lieu 2004: 7, 17–21). Central to this definition for many Christian writers was the fact that Christians were not – or at least should not be – pagan spectacle-goers. Tertullian, for instance, asserts that Christians "have nothing to do in speech, sight, or hearing with the madness of the circus, the shamelessness of the theater, the savagery of the arena, the vanity of the gymnasium" (*Apology* 38.4). Similarly, in Minucius Felix's *Octavius*, a pagan character identifies Christians as those who "do not attend the shows; . . . take no part in the processions; fight shy of the public banquets; abhor the sacred games" (7.5–6). According to early Christian moralists, to be Christian meant to abstain from the spectacles of pagan Roman culture – a fact which these authors explained to non-Christian audiences in apologetical treatises and of which they regularly had to remind their Christian followers.

While rejection of Roman spectacle culture played a significant role in forging an early Christian identity for numerous early Christian moralists, it is worth noting that many Christian writers also worked to establish a Christian identity by appropriating the language and the imagery of Roman spectacles and by recasting the arena in Christian terms. For example, Novatian and Tertullian assert that Christians had no need for pagan spectacles because they had their own, better spectacles to enjoy. These “Christian spectacles” included the spectacles of the natural world (the rising and setting of the sun, the changing of seasons, the motion of the constellations (Novatian *On Spectacles* 9)), the spectacles of Scripture (the creation of the world, the parting of the seas, the recalling of souls from the dead (Novatian *On Spectacles* 10)), and the spectacles of Christian life (“the trampling underfoot of the gods of the pagans, expelling of demons, effecting cures, seeking revelations, living to god” (Tertullian *On Spectacles* 29)). These writers promised that at the end of days, “the greatest spectacle of all,” the second coming of Christ, awaited faithful Christians. When that occurred, they promised, the participants in pagan spectacles would be condemned in a truly spectacular fashion—and with every bit as much violence as that which Christian moralists decried in the pagan spectacles (Novatian *On Spectacles* 19; Tertullian *On Spectacles* 30).³

Other Christian writers co-opted the imagery of the arena in discussing and recasting Christian martyrdom. Both Cyprian, a third-century CE bishop of Carthage, and Minucius Felix portrayed martyrdom as a pleasing “spectacle to the Lord” in the cosmic arena in which, according to Cyprian, God was both the main spectator and the source of the martyrs’ strength (Cyprian *Letters* 7.2–3, 9; Futrell 2006: 171). In a similar vein, several narratives celebrating specific Christian martyrdoms, known as “Martyr Acts,” were written and circulated within the early Christian community. As Futrell aptly notes, these “Martyr Acts” “reconfigured the meaning of the arena . . . claiming martyrdom as a demonstration of Christian authority rather than that of Rome” and “consolidated these identity-forming patterns within the group” of early Christians throughout the Mediterranean world (Futrell 2006: 173).

Early Christian discourse on Roman spectacles in its many forms was thus closely tied to processes of Christian identity formation. By opposing Roman spectacle culture, turning Roman allegations against Christians back on the Romans through a discussion of spectacles, and appropriating the language and imagery of pagan spectacles for Christian purposes, early Christian writers both defined what it meant to live as an early Christian against the example of the pagan, spectacle-loving “other” and redefined what it meant to die in these

spectacles at the hands of the very same Romans.

6 Conclusion

Opposition to sport and spectacle in the Roman world was not what modern readers might expect. Most Romans had plenty of reasons to like spectacles – even in their most violent forms – and opposition was hardly the norm within pagan Roman society. When objections were voiced, they varied in their substance and their specific motivations, but all were inextricably linked to the identity of the groups or individuals voicing the objections. For members of the Roman literary elite and the Stoics, opposition to the traditional, Roman-style spectacles that were popular among the masses allowed for elite and philosophical self-positioning and the exploration of proper elite pastimes in relation to those of the masses. For those who opposed Greek-style athletic games and training in Roman contexts, opposition allowed critics to distinguish themselves from those who appreciated or participated in Greek athletics; for elite Romans, this meant immoral Greeks; for doctors such as Galen, incompetent athletic trainers; and for intellectuals, athletes who neglected their minds and souls through excessive athletic training. Finally, for both Jews and early Christian moralists, opposition to pagan spectacles in all their forms provided a means for defining and defending Jewish and Christian religious identity against the pagan culture in which spectacles played such a central role. Simply put, opposition to sport and spectacle was relatively uncommon in the Roman world, but when it was voiced it allowed ancient critics to define their group and individual identities and position themselves in relation to so many spectacle-loving “others.”

NOTES

1 On gladiatorial games, see Chapters 25, 30, 31, and 32 in this volume. On beast hunts and public executions, see Chapters 34 and 35, respectively.

2 Seneca objected to executions that only delighted the audience rather than teaching them a lesson (*Letters from a Stoic* 7), but otherwise he had no reservations about public executions. Juvenal alone voiced unqualified opposition to spectacular execution, asserting that the revenge was for the small-minded and that the only thing public executions taught the audience was cruelty – a

view that was by no means mainstream (*Satires* 13.28, 14.15; Wistrand 1992: 23).

3 It is persuasively argued in Frilingos 2004 that Roman spectacle played a significant role in shaping the Book of Revelation. For further discussion of Christian responses to the arena, see Chapter 39.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Wistrand 1992 provides a thorough and highly accessible overview of the attitudes of nine Roman writers of the first century CE to sport and spectacle in all their forms, treating the objections of the literary elite and the Stoics on a spectacle-by-spectacle basis. For a thorough overview of opposition to gladiatorial games, with extensive citation of primary sources, see Wiedemann 1992: 128–64 (though the reader should be careful not to give too much credence to Wiedemann’s ultimate conclusions concerning the demise of the games).

On the various reasons why there was widespread acceptance of sport and spectacle among Romans of all classes, see Flower 2004b and Chapters 30 and 31 in this volume. On Roman attitudes toward animal spectacles, see Shelton 1999 and 2004. On Roman attitudes toward those who performed in spectacles, see Edwards 1997. On Cicero’s attitudes toward sport and spectacle, see Crowther 2004: 387–419. For thorough and clearly argued treatments of the attitudes of Seneca toward gladiatorial spectacles, see Wistrand 1990 and Cagniard 2000.

For an introduction to Roman philosophy, see Long 2003. On the Stoics in particular, see the essays collected in Inwood 2003.

For a relatively brief survey of Roman reactions to Greek culture, see Rawson 1989. For full-length treatments of that complicated subject, see Gruen 1990 and 1992 and Rawson 1985. Also useful are the articles collected in Guldager Bilde, Nielsen, and Nielsen 2003. Newby 2005 and König 2005: 205–344 offer sophisticated but accessible treatments of the rise of Greek athletics in Rome and the elite opposition that accompanied it. See also Mähl 1974; Mann 2002; and Scarborough 1985. König 2005: 254–300 is essential reading for anyone interested in Galen’s objections to inappropriate athletic training. See also Ibáñez 2003. For an introduction to Galen’s life and

work, see the essays collected in Hankinson 2008. On Roman attitudes toward Greek athletic nudity, see Crowther 2004: 375–80.

On Herod and his relationship with the Romans, see Richardson 1996. On the attitude of Jews toward Roman spectacle, see Weiss 1999. For brief surveys of the relationship between Christians and the Roman government in the first three centuries CE and of early Christian thought, see Fredriksen 2006 and Edwards 2006, respectively. On Christian objections to Roman spectacle, see Futrell 2006: 160–88 and Wiedemann 1992: 146–60. On the Christian “Martyr Acts”, see Musurillo 1972.

PART IV

Later Roman Spectacle and Sport

CHAPTER 42

Romanization through Spectacle in the Greek East

Michael J. Carter

1 Introduction: Roman(izing?) Spectacles

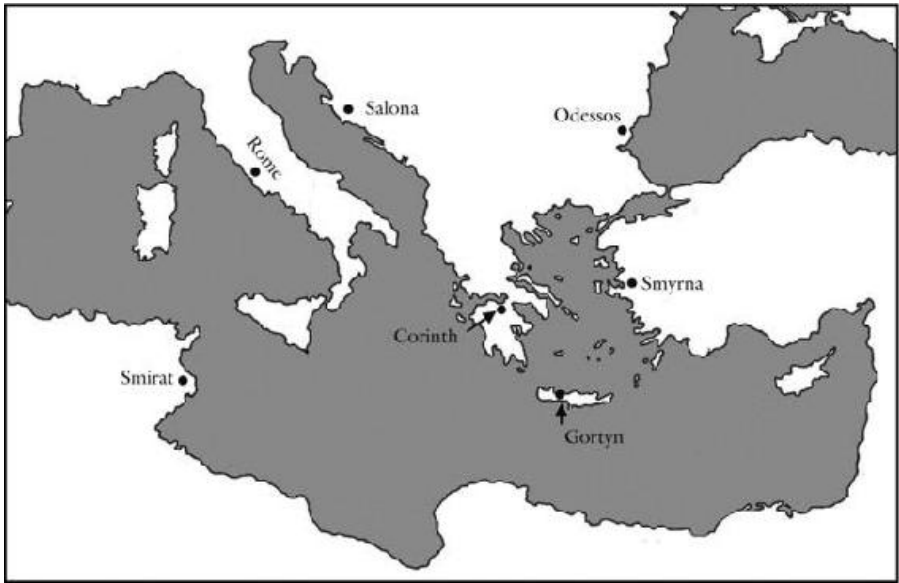
In the spring of 227 CE, the people of Odessos, a Greek city in the Roman province of Moesia Inferior, were given expensive spectacles for their entertainment (see [Map 42.1](#) for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay). We know about these spectacles because a large, stone inscription announcing them still survives. The inscription provides the official reasons for the show, the date, and the identity of those paying for it. The stone was decorated with a series of reliefs depicting the show to come: gladiators, animals (mainly bulls), and beast hunters. Given the permanence of this stone announcement, it is probable that the inscription was meant not only to advertise the spectacles before they took place, but also to commemorate them long afterwards.

With good fortune! For the fortune and victory and eternal endurance of the most holy and great and unconquerable emperor Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander, Pius, Felix, Augustus and for the fortune of Julia Mamaea the Augusta and their whole house and for the sacred Senate and people of Rome and for the sacred armies and for the illustrious Lucius Mantennius Sabinus the military governor and for the council and people of Odessos . . . the chief priests of the city, Marcus Aurelius Simon, son of Simon, the councilor, and Marcus Aurelius Io . . . [the stone is damaged] through beast-hunts and

gladiatorial combats [. . . a certain number of . . .] days before the Kalends of May [or March, the stone is damaged] in the consulship of Albinus and Maximus.¹ (*Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae* I.2: no. 70; *Bulletin épigraphique* 1972: no. 300)

What we see here was repeated in cities all over the Empire, including the ancient and sophisticated Greek cities around the Aegean Sea.

Map 42.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



Although gladiatorial combats had been exhibited in Rome from the mid-third century BCE and beast hunts (*venationes* in Latin, *kunegesia* in Greek) from at least the early second century BCE, their diffusion throughout the Empire, both East and West, was especially a phenomenon of the Imperial period (31 BCE–476 CE), in particular, the first to third centuries CE. By that time, a set of Roman games, known as a *munus* (plural *munera*), tended to include executions as well as *venationes* and gladiatorial combats (Ville 1981: 391–3).²

Just as at Odessos, most Roman spectacles in the provinces were closely connected with the celebration of the imperial cult, that is, the worship of the Roman emperor as a god.³ When a priest of the imperial cult came into office, he was expected to provide a *munus*.⁴

Because such spectacles seem so ostentatiously Roman, and because of their close association with the worship of the Roman emperor, it is tempting to link these shows with the deliberate projection of Roman power and influence into the provinces. Yet, there is no evidence that it was ever a policy of the emperors or the imperial administration to promote the spread of the Roman *munus* among their provincial subjects. Whereas emperors staged *munera* in

Rome, maintained gladiatorial troupes, and could make both convicts and beasts available (presumably for a price) to be exhibited and killed in provincial shows (Dunkle 2008: 51–4, 173–90), they never compelled their provincial subjects to adopt the spectacles of the arena. Indeed, they were often willing to support requests to forego these expensive spectacles if other, more worthy, civic projects were needed (Coleman 2008). The connection with the imperial cult, moreover, probably points to local motivation rather than direction from Rome. In the eastern, Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire, the imperial cult was a way for the Greeks themselves to translate the vast power of Rome into a local setting, either civic or provincial (Price 1984). However Roman these games at Odessos may appear, they were put on by Greeks, for Greeks, in a Greek ceremonial context.

The significance of all this is debated. While some scholars believe that the spread of these shows to the provinces indicates little more than a popular taste for bloodshed and exciting entertainment, most now argue that the shows point to broader cultural changes brought on by centuries of Roman rule (see, for example, Woolf 1994). Traditionally, scholarship has identified this process as “Romanization.” As a concept, however, Romanization has been controversial, primarily because it is rooted in outdated nineteenth-century European experiences of empire, which, it was thought, resulted in the spread of European institutions to what was seen as the less civilized colonies (Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 9–17). But no society simply adopts perfectly the ideas, practices, or institutions of another without first understanding them in terms of its own culture and then, perhaps, altering them to its own needs and expectations. The focus of study, therefore, should not be the (ostensible) imposition of cultural institutions, or even the assimilation of such institutions into a provincial context, but, rather, the effects that these institutions had on provincial – here Greek – culture and cultural identities.

Despite the difficulties that many see in defining “cultural identity” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Pitts 2007), it is possible to outline central features that are shared by different members participating in the group identity – what Greg Woolf refers to as “the parameters of discourse” (Woolf 1994: 118). In a similar way, Jonathan Hall observes that ethnic identities are “discursively constructed” from within by the participants themselves and not imposed from without (Hall 1997: 2). The mass public spectacles of the Greek and Roman world provided an ideal arena where such a discourse could take place.

A considerable and constantly growing body of evidence shows that audiences at spectacles staged in the eastern half of the Roman

Empire closely engaged with the events they voluntarily attended. They were not passive recipients of Roman culture, but active consumers, and they shaped the spectacles they attended in ways that reflected their own cultural traditions. Roman spectacles in the Greek East were, therefore, mutually influential dialogues that involved a number of different groups including government officials, soldiers, and others from Rome itself; elite and nonelite local residents with varying degrees of exposure to Roman culture and allegiance to Rome; and, of course, the performers.⁵

2 Spectacle

Much of what we know about the popularity of Roman spectacles in the Greek provinces of the Empire is due to the work of Louis Robert. By assembling hundreds of inscriptions relating to the presentation of gladiatorial combats, spectacular executions, and beasts hunts in the Greek world, Robert demonstrated the degree to which the Greeks adopted these shows as their own. For Robert, the evident popularity of these Roman spectacles was “one of the successes of the Romanization of the Greek world.” Yet, he did not explore the significance of this beyond the observation that “Greek society had been infected by this sickness from Rome” (Robert 1940: 263).

In both the scholarly world and popular imagination there has long existed a sharp division between “sport” and “spectacle,” a division that splits the Greeks from the Romans. The Greeks gave the world sport, physical contests between athletes who competed for simple wreath crowns in order to display their excellence (*arete*). The Romans preferred worthless spectacle that pandered to the lowest, bloodiest tastes of the idle masses, and their emperors bought the loyalty of the populace with free food and mindless entertainments – Juvenal’s famous *panem et circenses* (“bread and circuses,” *Satires* 10.81). Sport is good; spectacle is bad.

All of this is tied up in modern stereotypes. Where “sport” conjures images of fitness and the active struggle for excellence, “spectacle” presents us with the negative: the passive observer being entertained by empty illusion, with an emphasis “on surface over content, on special effects that appeal to the senses, rather than on ideas engaging the intellect” (Bergmann 1999: 11).

But the sport/spectacle: Greek/Roman dichotomy is misleading. Right from the very beginning of Greek sport we find the presence of spectators to have been an integral element in athletic competitions. Without spectators to watch and applaud them the whole point of

athletes competing against each other was lost (Scanlon 1983). This is evident in our earliest literary source for Greek sport, Homer, whose accounts of sporting events make clear that onlookers were expected. For example, when Odysseus visits Phaiakia, his hosts arrange a set of athletic competitions, and, as Homer describes it, all the best men of the Phaiakians went “to gaze at the contests” and “an endless multitude followed” (*Odyssey* 8.96–233). For Greeks of Homer’s time, and for a long period thereafter, visible participation in athletics was a sign of elite status (see Chapter 3). Later, one of the defining elements of the major agonistic festivals of Greece – the Olympian, then the Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian Games – was the throngs of spectators they attracted (see Chapter 17).

Audiences at Roman spectacles were even more engaged than their counterparts at Greek sporting events. Cicero, writing in the first century BCE, saw that the political power of an audience in the theater and at the games equaled that of political assemblies (Cicero *For Publius Sestius* 106, 116). The political elite in Rome were more open to challenge in the theater, circus, and amphitheater than anywhere else. The people as a group were able to “talk back” to their political masters, even to the emperor or his designates during the Imperial period. They had the power to cheer or to deride (Parker 1999). David Potter has summed up the politicized character of Roman spectacles concisely: “Virtually every aspect of Roman hierarchy was open to challenge – public executions could go awry if the crowd demanded the release of the condemned, gladiators could become heroes, charioteers could become millionaires, and actors might challenge the order of society by the way they chose to utter their lines” (Potter 2006b: 385). (For further discussion of Roman spectacle as a site for dialogue between the masses and the elite, see Chapter 30.)

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that ancient concepts of viewing were different from our own. Whereas we consider spectators to be passive observers of spectacles performed for them, the ancient Greeks and Romans had it the other way around. They were keenly aware that viewing was bidirectional: the viewer watched the viewed. Spectating was thus an active process, and the spectacle was the object of their gaze (Frilingos 2004: 15). The act of viewing meant that the assembled people were fundamentally involved in the spectacle and just as important to it as those performing, whether they were aristocratic athletes or servile gladiators. Because the spectators assembled together, they helped to create their community, and because they assembled in order to watch something that deeply mattered to them, space was created for debates about cultural values, social relationships, ethnicity, gender, even identity: Were the athletes

Greek? Could women compete? Did they cheat? Would they give their life for victory? Indeed, the very act of spectating seems to have had a religious dimension to it, analogous to modern perceptions of pilgrimage. By visiting the great agonistic festivals, spectators represented their own city (the locus for their primary identity) and also participated in the broader Greek community (Rutherford 2000). In one real sense, the importance of the spectacle lay in the fact that the people gathered together to watch.⁶

3 Beast Hunts and Executions

While the theater or the circus could give voice to a gathering of people, it was while watching a *munus* that they had deliberate roles to play. As mentioned earlier, by the first century CE *munera* frequently involved more than simply gladiatorial combats; they typically also included beast hunts (as at Odessos for example) as well as executions and perhaps other forms of entertainment. Beast hunts usually took place in the morning, followed by (or including) executions around noon, and then gladiatorial combats in the afternoon (Ville 1981: 391–3). For example, in his fictional account of the gladiatorial combat at Amastris, Lucian describes what he and Sisinnus saw in the theater before the gladiators were introduced: “Having taken our seats, we first saw wild beasts brought down with spears and hunted by dogs, and set against men in chains, evil-doers, we reasoned. When in came the gladiators” (Lucian *Toxaris* 59).

The people were not passive spectators being entertained by the animals that came before them. Instead they took an active role in the spectacle, either approving or disapproving of what was shown to them. For example, a mosaic from Smirat in North Africa that dates to the third century CE depicts and commemorates a *venatio* presented by a local magistrate named Magerius. The edges of the mosaic depict hunters slaying leopards in the arena; the central portion features a portrait of Magerius surrounded by a considerable amount of text (see [Figure 42.1](#)). Much of the text records the crowd’s response to a herald’s announcement of the generous rewards Magerius would offer to the hunters for their performance. The inscription probably captures what was actually shouted that day in the arena, and, because their phrases are metrical and repetitive (*Hoc est habere! Hoc est posse!*), it is possible that the audience shouted this sort of thing in unison:

The shout in reply: “May future generations know of your *munus*

because you are an example for them; may past generations hear about it. Where has such a thing been heard before? When has such a thing been heard before? You have provided a *munus* as an example to the other magistrates. You have provided a *munus* from your own resources.” *Magerius pays* [the money]. “This is what it is to have money! This is what it is to have power! Now that it is evening, they have been dismissed from your *munus* with bags of money.”

It is probable that the people also shouted out Magerius’s name since the vocative form of his name – *Mageri* – appears twice on the mosaic as well.⁷

Figure 42.1 Mosaic from Smirat, Tunisia showing beast hunt and sponsor (Magerius), c.250 CE. *Source:* Vanni/Art Resource, NY.



The people clearly approved of Magerius’s exhibition, but there are examples where the people did not approve. One of the most famous comes to us from Rome. At the opening of the Theater of Pompey in Rome (55 BCE), it is reported that the sight of elephants being slaughtered at a *venatio* while apparently appealing for mercy roused the sympathy of the spectators and reflected badly on Pompey (Cicero *Letters to His Friends* 7.1.3; Pliny *Natural History* 8.20–1; Dio Cassius 39.38.2–3; cf. Bell 2004: 157–72; Shelton 1999 and 2004; and Chapter 34 in this volume).

Wild beasts, such as bears, bulls, and big cats, were also set against bound human victims, among whom Christians figured prominently.

We have several accounts, called martyr acts, that recount such occurrences from a Christian perspective and that offer a unique view of events from the arena floor.

One of the things that stands out in these accounts is the active role of the crowd (Potter 1993). For example, in the middle of the second century CE at Smyrna in the province of Asia, a group of Christians was exposed to the beasts. A martyr act describes what happened:

For the most noble Germanicus strengthened the timidity of others by the perseverance that he showed, and he fought heroically with the wild beasts (*etheriomachesen*). For, when the proconsul⁸ sought to persuade him, and urged him to take pity upon his young age, he, with a show of force, dragged the beast on top of himself, being desirous to escape all the more quickly from this unjust and lawless world. But upon this the whole mob was astonished at the great nobility of mind displayed by the devout and godly race of the Christians. They cried out, “Away with the Atheists! Go get Polycarp!” (*The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 3.1–2)⁹

These events almost certainly took place during a *munus* celebrated by the provincial priest of the imperial cult, a certain Philip of Tralleis, who is mentioned in the text. The setting was especially suitable for executing Christians: one of the tests for early Christians facing execution was whether they would recant their religion and offer sacrifice to the Roman emperor as a god. The astonishment of the crowd is significant. While we must not lose sight of the fact that this piece was written by Christians for Christians, Germanicus is here presented as a sort of “star” in the arena, if only for a short time. Though some fellow Christians were too cowardly to fight and recanted, Germanicus made himself notable when he fought the beasts (*etheriomachesen*) so bravely. His performance amazed the people. For a moment he was like a famous beast hunter, imbued with the same power to astound the people as those beast hunters at Magerius’s show in Smirat. Amazement was a by-product of such shows (Frilingos 2004: 50–2).

One of the more remarkable facets of the sort of spectacle described above is the active participation of the crowd in meting out punishment (Potter 1993 and 1996: 147–55 and *passim*; cf. Thompson 2002). After Germanicus’s performance, the people called for Polycarp, the leader of the Christian community in Smyrna, and he was later arrested and brought before the crowd to be tried by the governor. The governor interrogating Polycarp commanded him to defend himself before the assembled people and, when he refused,

threatened him with beasts and fire. Had Polycarp been able (or desired) to convince them, the people could presumably have requested his release (Potter 1996: 157). After his interrogation failed to convince Polycarp to sacrifice to the emperor, the governor ordered his herald to announce three times that Polycarp had confessed that he was a Christian. This incited the mob first to call on Philip to turn a lion loose on Polycarp, and when he declined (because of a legal technicality: the *munus* had ended), to demand that Polycarp be incinerated, which he then was (*The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12.2–3).

Audiences at Roman spectacles seem to have regularly exercised agency of this sort. At about the same time that Polycarp was active in Smyrna, Fronto wrote to the future emperor Marcus Aurelius to advise him to heed the power of the people at spectacles:

Be prepared, when you speak before an assembly of men, to study their taste . . . And when you do so, remind yourself that you are but doing the same as you do when, at the people's request [*populo postulante*], you honor or free those who have slain beasts manfully in the arena, even though they are murderers or condemned for some crime, you release them at the people's request [*populo postulante*]. Everywhere then the people dominate and prevail. (*To the Caesar Marcus* 1.8, trans. C. Haines slightly modified)

Apuleius, writing in the second century CE, provides an account of a *munus* in Corinth that, though fictional, seems to reflect accurately a fairly typical spectacle. The *munus* includes a woman who had been convicted for murder and sentenced to public execution in the arena. Apuleius notes that before the condemned murderess was to be lead out to be bestially raped and killed, a soldier emerged to introduce the condemned woman *iam populo postulante* – “at the people's request” (*Metamorphoses* 10.34).

The key point for us is that these spectacles were legal executions – the fulfillment of a sentence handed down by a Roman court (Potter 1993). Though local courts were maintained in the provinces, only Roman courts held jurisdiction over penal or criminal matters and only Roman courts could pronounce capital punishment on freemen (Brélaz 2008). Though arrested by local officials, Polycarp was notably interrogated and sentenced by the proconsul (the chief Roman magistrate in the province); only he had the authority to do so.

By witnessing and participating in the spectacle, by applauding what happened there, perhaps even by demanding that it happen in the first place, the assembled people demonstrably approved not only of the execution of various convicts, but also of the whole process and structure that brought the spectacular execution about. The people's

appreciation at seeing Germanicus's amazing fight translated into approval of the authorities. They were actively supporting a spectacle in which a Roman governor dispensed Roman justice in connection with a celebration of the Roman emperor as a god.

There may be more to this. The *munus* itself held deeper symbolic significance, for Romans at least. *Venationes* could be seen to celebrate the triumph of Roman civilization over the hostile natural world, spectacular executions to celebrate the triumph of Roman justice over those who opposed or rejected Roman civilization (Wiedemann 1992: 46). Did provincial Greek spectators see it this way too? The spectacle invested the people with real power and laid the ruling structure of the Empire open to challenge. Sympathy for the wild beasts meant disapproval of the civilizing emperor and army who eliminated them or kept them at bay; disapproval or rejection of the death of a convict meant rejection of the justice system that had convicted him or her. Reject the show, reject those who produced it.

On the other hand, acceptance and approval of the spectacle meant much more than just appreciation for seeing beasts and criminals killed. It meant an approbation and reaffirmation of the entire ruling structure that had made it possible. That ruling structure was not only Roman, but included the necessary cooperation of the local elites as well. Polycarp, for example, was arrested by local officials (the *irenarchs* or “keepers of the peace”), not the Roman army, and the shows were presented by local Greek priests of the imperial cult, not the Roman governor. A reexamination of our invitation from Odessos, with which we started the chapter, reveals that the shows – gladiatorial combats and wild beast hunts – were put on not only to celebrate the reigning emperor, Severus Alexander, but indeed for the benefit of the entire ruling structure of the Empire, from the emperor at the top, to the imperial household, to the Senate and people of Rome, to the armies, to the governor, right down to the local council and people.

4 Gladiators

In most cases a *munus* culminated with the presentation of gladiatorial combats. There is much evidence to indicate that these were not necessarily fights to the death and that gladiators in most cases escaped with their lives. Gladiatorial combats were fought according to strict rules enforced by a referee (the *summa rudis*), who was present in the arena with the fighters (Carter 2006/7). Of course, gladiatorial combats were dangerous and could result in death, but so

too could traditional Greek combat sports: boxing, wrestling, and *pankration* (Scanlon 2002: 299–322). Georges Ville has calculated that the chances of a gladiator dying in any given bout were roughly 1 in 10 (Ville 1981: 318–25). Indeed, ordinary fights were not even fought with sharp weapons (Carter 2006). We hear of gladiatorial combats that were required to be fought to the death, but they seem to have been exceptional and might even have required permission from the imperial authorities (Dunkle 2008: 136–7).

If a gladiator were wounded he could request *missio* (release), usually by raising his hand or a finger, a gesture also found in Greek athletics (Miller 2004: 56). Gladiators were said to fight *ad digitum* (“to the finger”). The *summa rudis* then intervened to separate the combatants, a scene often seen in depictions of the gladiatorial combat (see [Figure 31.2](#)). At that point the defeated gladiator could either be granted *missio* or condemned to immediate execution. The decision was made by the person responsible for organizing the games in question, the *editor*, who consulted with the crowd over each such decision and was expected to adhere to its wishes (Dunkle 2008: 130–40). For Ville, those moments when the decisions to grant or deny *missio* or even to grant freedom were made marked the climax of the whole spectacle (Ville 1981: 424; cf. Flaig 2007: 87). Here again, we see spectators playing an active role.

Victorious gladiators could expect substantial rewards, including in some instances their freedom. Many, probably most, gladiators ended up on the arena floor involuntarily; they were prisoners of war or condemned criminals who entered gladiatorial training under compulsion (Dunkle 2008: 30–8). However, as is clear in a rescript from the emperor Hadrian, all gladiators, even those who had been criminally condemned, had the opportunity to win their freedom if they survived (*Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio* 11.7, citing Ulpian). Perhaps the people also had the power to give freedom to a gladiator. For example, an epitaph from Salona in what is now Croatia commemorates a deceased gladiator, who had been granted freedom from the arena: “To the Immortal Shades. For the civilian man, Thelonicus, once a *retiarius* who was freed with the *rudis* by the piety of the people, Xustus his friend and Pepticius his comrade erected this”¹⁰ (*Année Epigraphique* 1934: no. 284).

All of this suggests that the gladiatorial combats were about something other than homicide. People did not come to see gladiators butchered; there was plenty of butchery in the executions that typically preceded the gladiators’ appearance on the floor of the arena. What they did come to see were duels between trained competitors, in which courage, martial skill, and discipline were put on display.

Gladiators embodied the fundamental Roman value of *virtus* (Wiedemann 1992: 35–8), which was more aggressive than simple “courage” and was gauged by behavior rather than assumed as a mindset (Harris 2006; Rosenstein 2006). There was a strong inclination among both *editores* and audiences to spare the lives of gladiators who displayed *virtus*. Thus the *munus* was in some ways a celebration of this key Roman value.

Egon Flaig has persuasively argued that the willingness of non-Roman provincials, such as the Greeks, to participate in this process of granting *missio* indicates “a desire of provincial populations to integrate themselves into the Roman culture of bravery and military values. Those who accepted gladiatorial combat as a part of cultural life accepted the framework of Roman virtues and their celebration” (Flaig 2007: 86). This profound observation gives force to the idea that gladiatorial combats had a Romanizing impact, altering the values of provincial cultures.

This dynamic may well have played itself out differently in different parts of the Empire because whereas gladiators in the western provinces tended to liken themselves to soldiers (Hope 2000), in the eastern part of the Roman world they perceived and presented themselves as athletic heroes. Their tombstones and other monuments evoke images of heroic and athletic victors (Golden 2008: 68–104; Mann 2009).

This merging of gladiators and athletes built upon long-standing traditions in Greek culture. The values celebrated in gladiatorial combat – excellence in ostentatious single combat – are essentially the same as those at the heart of Greek athletics. As early as the Archaic period (700–480 BCE) in Greek history, the heroic champions of earlier days had been replaced by a new military formation – the hoplite phalanx. The battlefield was no longer the place for individual acts of courage and honor of the sort that had been celebrated by Homer. Indeed, such individualistic values were discouraged in war in favor of the corporate discipline and courage demanded by hoplite warfare. No longer as important on the battlefield, the old aristocratic values celebrating individual honor and victory in single combat were removed to the *gymnasion* and to the competitive athletics of the great athletic festivals (Müller 1995: 115–25; though cf. Christesen 2007: 60 and *passim*). This agonistic spirit, which had its roots in the Greek heroic age, maintained much of its martial origins into later Greek history. For example, an epitaph found at Olympia and dating to the third century CE reads, “He died here, boxing in the stadium, having prayed to Zeus for victory or death” (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 22.354, trans. M. Poliakoff). The ideology of both athletes and gladiators was rooted in the same martial principles: ostentatious

victory or death. Athletic self-presentation by gladiators thus made immediate sense and was entirely recognizable to Greeks (Carter 2009).

5 Conclusion

It is possible that the spectacle was an important bridge between the cultural worlds of the Greeks and Romans. But it might also have been a focus for a debate concerning what was Greek and what was Roman. This, it seems to me, is the key element in what we might now think of as Romanization. Far from being empty illusions entertaining passive spectators, the grand public spectacles of the Greek and Roman world were dynamic events that gave an active role to the gathered people. This is especially true of the Roman *munus*, which was in many ways a spectacle putting the whole ruling structure of the Empire on the line: cheers indicated approval of the capture and slaughter of dangerous beasts by Roman power, the execution of criminals by Roman authorities, and the martial virtue of the gladiators. This last one was especially significant since the gladiatorial combats in particular presented Greek spectators with an ideology completely familiar to them and at the heart of athletic values fundamental to Greek self-definition. In many ways, gladiators were athletes par excellence. A gladiator from Gortyn on Crete perhaps said it best: “The olive is not the prize; we fight for our lives!” (Robert 1940: no. 66). Was the Roman so alien after all?

NOTES

- 1 All translations of Greek and Latin texts presented here, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.
- 2 *Munus* originally meant “duty” or “gift.” It gradually came to be used for both spectacles in general and gladiatorial games in particular, with the latter meaning becoming the more dominant one over the course of time. See Ville 1981: 72–8.
- 3 On the connection between imperial cult and spectacle in the Roman world, see Dodge 2009; Fishwick 1987–2005: vol. 1.1: 97–137, vol. 3.3: 305–50; and Futrell 1997: 79–93. On gladiatorial combats, see Chapters 25, 30, 31, and 32 in this volume. On beast hunts and public executions, see Chapters 34 and 35 respectively.
- 4 Newly appointed imperial priests thus had a sudden need for

animals and a host of personnel. One way of dealing with this logistical problem was to lease gladiators and the requisite support staff (referees, trainers, etc.). In many provinces, such as Asia, however, it was common for priests to own their own troupes, buying them from the previous priest and selling them to their successors in office. Some of these troupes are known to have included not only gladiators, but also convicts, presumably awaiting execution during a show. It is probable that the convicts were purchased from the imperial government (Carter 2003).

5 A similar process played itself out in the western half of the Roman Empire, but with enough differences as to make it necessary to focus here largely on the eastern part of the empire.

6 There is an extensive body of scholarly literature on the effects of spectating, particularly in large groups. The foundational work on this subject was done by Durkheim in the early part of the twentieth century (Durkheim 2001 (1912)). Insights from Durkheim and his many successors have been fruitfully applied to the study of Roman spectacle by a number of important works, most recently in Fagan 2011: 189–229.

7 On the Magerius mosaic, see Beschtaouch 1966; Blanchard-Lemée, Ennaïfer, Slim, *et al.* 1996 (1995): 209–14 and fig. 162; Dunbabin 1978: 67–70 and figs. 52–3; Brown 1992: 198–200; Potter 1996: 129–30; Bomgardner 2009; and Fagan 2011: 128–32. On the text on the mosaic, see *Année Epigraphique* 1967: no. 549. The interpretation of the text on the mosaic presents a number of challenges, most notably whether it should be read in two sections or three. The basic sense of the text is, however, clear.

8 A proconsul was the chief Roman magistrate in a province.

9 A (seemingly paradoxical) charge frequently leveled against Christians during this period was that they were atheists; see the discussion in Chapter 41. Polycarp was the leader of the Christian community in Smyrna. The key source for this event is the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, on which see Frilingos 2004: 116–19 and Musurillo 1972: xiii–xvi, 2–37. (The latter provides an English translation.)

10 The *rudis* was a wooden staff that was awarded to a gladiator to symbolize his permanent release. A *retiarius* was a type of gladiator that fought with a trident and net (Dunkle 2008: 71, 107–11).

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The debate about Romanization is ongoing, but useful summaries can be found in Woolf 1994; Wallace-Hadrill 2008; and Mann 2009. The idea of spectacle is tackled by leading scholars in Bergmann and Kondoleon 1999 and more recently by Potter 2006b and Coleman 2010. Also recently, Kyle 2007 and Potter 2012 have each brought together sport and spectacle into a single analysis.

For audience involvement in spectacles, two good starting places are Chapter 30 in the present volume and Potter 1996; see also Yavetz 1969; Veyne 1990: 292–482; and Parker 1999. Potter's 1993 study of the relationship between martyrdom and spectacle is also essential. Translation of key texts from among the martyr acts can be found in Musurillo 1972. Frilingos 2004 directs our understanding of ancient spectacle toward an interpretation of the Book of Revelation. On gladiators, beast hunts, and spectacular executions, see in this volume, Chapters 31, 32, 34, and 35. For gladiators in the Greek world (with specific bibliography), see Robert 1940; Golden 2008: 68–104; Mann 2009; and Carter 2009.

CHAPTER 43

Spectacle and Sport in Constantinople in the Sixth Century CE

David Alan Parnell

1 Introduction

In November 561 CE the fans gathered at the chariot races in the hippodrome of Constantinople created a serious disturbance.¹ The fans of the Green racing team attacked the fans of the Blue team. When the emperor Justinian heard about the riot, he ordered the commander of his guards to separate the two sides. The guards, however, proved unable to stop or even slow the fight, and it continued with the Blue fans invading the seats of the Green fans, chanting “Burn here, burn there! Not a Green anywhere.” In response, the Greens spilled out of the hippodrome and proceeded to riot in the streets, stoning the people they encountered, stealing property, and chanting “Set alight, set alight! Not a Blue in sight.” The riot lasted all night and into the next morning (Theophanes *Chronographia* 235–6, trans. C. Mango).

Chariot racing was without a doubt the most popular form of entertainment in the Byzantine world in the sixth through the eighth centuries. Most major cities in the eastern Mediterranean had their own hippodromes where races were held on a regular basis. In each hippodrome the competitors in the races were typically divided into four racing teams: the Blues, Greens, Whites, and Reds.

In the cities for which we have evidence, chariot races were connected with violent riots. It is reasonable to ask why the government tolerated the violence associated with the races and why the races were so popular despite condemnation from the Christian

religious authorities. As one ecclesiastical author put it, a hippodrome was nothing more than a “church of Satan” (John of Ephesos *Ecclesiastical History* 5.17).

This essay will consider the critical social role of spectacle and sport in the Byzantine world. Analysis will be limited primarily to the impact of chariot racing but will also touch upon the other important form of spectacle of the period – the pantomimes of the theater. There were also some sporting events in the period that occurred outside of the theaters and hippodromes, such as hunting, wrestling, and running.² While these may have been important to individuals, and hunting certainly seems to have been a significant pastime of the upper class, they do not qualify as public spectacles and hence are outside the scope of this essay.

We will concentrate on the sixth century, roughly between the reigns of Anastasius (491–518) and Phocas (602–10), because we are particularly well informed about that era of Byzantine history. Although some of the most accomplished Byzantine historians, including Procopius of Caesarea, wrote during this period, the best literary sources for spectacle and sport are actually the more humble chroniclers rather than traditional historians. Chroniclers such as John Malalas wrote relatively short, simple works that were intended for a slightly less educated audience than longer, more complex narrative histories. This means that these chroniclers tended to focus more on what was popular and felt less constrained to follow historiographical traditions that went back to Thucydides. For our purposes, this means more frank references to popular spectacles, which improve our understanding of their impact on Byzantine society (Cameron 1976: 139).

2 Byzantine Spectacle

Although Byzantine society was a direct continuation of Roman society and also retained some features of Greek culture, Byzantine spectacle and sport of the sixth century looked rather different from its Roman and Greek predecessors. By this period, the gladiatorial combats and beast hunts that the earlier Roman world made famous and the tradition of individual athletic competition that included the Olympic Games of the Greek world were both in eclipse.³ By the reign of Anastasius, the two major forms of spectacle in the Byzantine world were the pantomimes of the theater and chariot races of the hippodrome.

The theater was home to some of the most popular figures of the

day, and contemporaries were clearly enamored of the acts performed there. The theater of the sixth century, which was bawdier and rather less intellectual than the drama of ancient Greece, was dominated by the performances of dancing pantomimes (Mango 1981: 341–4; Roueché 2008: 680–2). We know something of their performances thanks to the scathing attacks of the somewhat prudish Procopius of Caesarea in his *Secret History*. He writes that the empress Theodora, in her days as a dancer in the theater, was not ashamed to walk about largely unclothed in front of an audience. Apparently she was famous for an act in which she lay on her back, with only a small cloth covering her groin, and patiently waited for geese to peck grains of barley off of her nearly naked body (Procopius *Secret History* 9.20–3).

Although Procopius tells this story in an attempt to discredit Theodora, it was clearly acts like this that made the pantomimes of the theater so popular. In fact, pantomime was so important that banning theatrical shows was considered a significant punishment, such as when Justin I banished all the pantomimes in the Empire after a major riot in 522 (John Malalas *Chronographia* 416–17). The popularity of the theater is further emphasized by the fact that popular disturbances were just as common in theaters as they were in hippodromes, as evidenced by a riot in a theater in Constantinople in 501 that cost three thousand lives (Marcellinus Comes *Chronicle* a.501). A riot in the theater at Antioch in 529 resulted in Justinian banning theatrical shows in the city (John Malalas *Chronographia* 448–9). Because of the frequent short-term moratoriums on the theater (due to the riots they incited), spectators in the early sixth century may have gravitated more to the only remaining large-scale public spectacle: chariot races.

In the late fifth century, chariot racing and theater were both standardized across the Byzantine Empire and their administration assumed by the government. Government administration of these spectacles is implied by the statement of John Malalas that the charioteer Kallipos was “given” by the administration to the Greens in Antioch (John Malalas *Chronographia* 395–6). It is probably also implied by Procopius’s charge that Justinian diverted to the central treasury the revenues that cities had been raising locally for their own civic needs and public spectacles (Procopius *Secret History* 26.6). Thus, in typical Byzantine fashion, sport and spectacle were bureaucratized in the late fifth century. The state paid and organized what historians have come to call the “factions” – the professional racing teams of the Blues, Greens, Reds, and Whites.⁴ Thus, whereas there was competition between these teams on the track, there was no organizational or business competition since all were owned, administered, and paid by the government (Cameron 1976: 5–73). (On

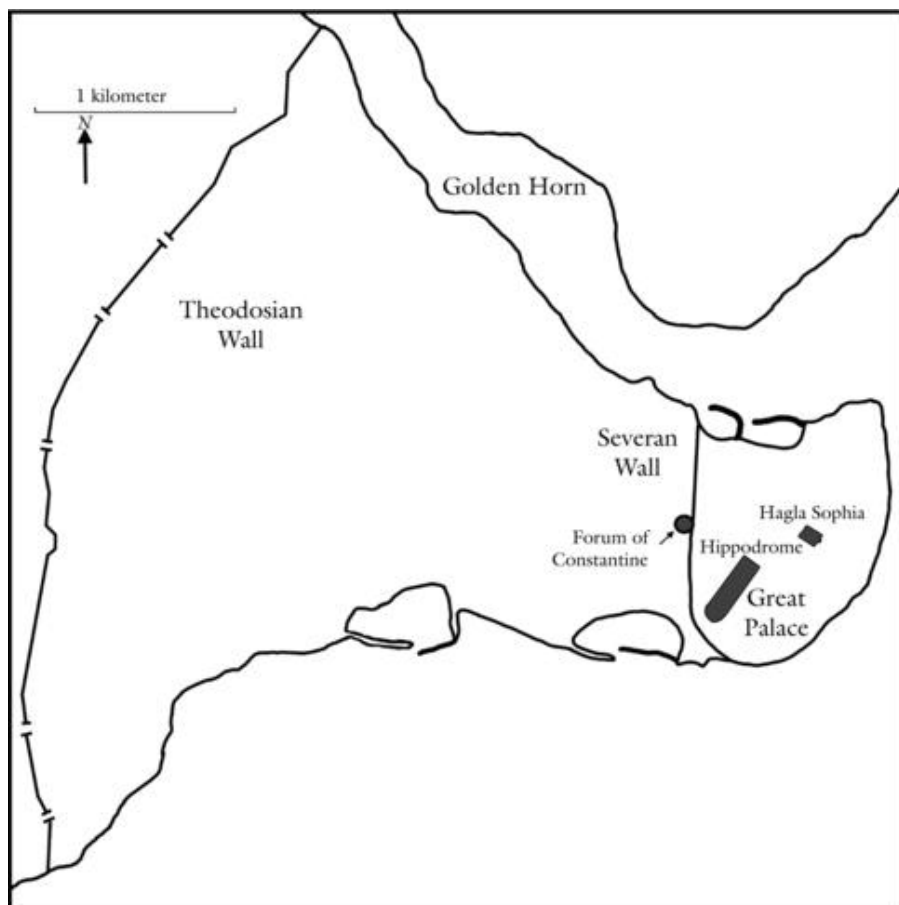
the organization of chariot racing in Rome, see Chapter 33 in this volume.)

The best charioteers were revered figures. The most popular and most frequently victorious charioteer of the sixth century was undoubtedly Porphyrius, about whom Alan Cameron has written a definitive book. Cameron counts at least seven statues dedicated to Porphyrius by his fans of both the Blue and Green persuasion, one of which was made partly of gold (Cameron 1973: 221).

The importance of chariot racing in the Byzantine world is evident from the central position of the hippodrome in the capital, Constantinople. The Greek city of Byzantium was founded in the seventh century BCE and became part of the Roman Empire in 129 BCE. It was sacked in 196 CE, during one of the civil wars that convulsed the Roman Empire, by forces under the command of Septimius Severus, who saw to the rebuilding of the city shortly thereafter. Constantine I captured Byzantium in the course of another civil war, and in 330 CE he refounded the city, which became known as Constantinople, and made it the capital of the entire Roman Empire. When the Roman Empire split into western and eastern halves at the end of the fourth century, Constantinople was the capital of the eastern half, which evolved into the Byzantine Empire. Constantinople remained the most important city in the Byzantine world until the final collapse of Byzantine power in 1453 (Bassett 2004: 18–26; Cartledge 2009: 167–76; Jeffreys 2008: 232–94).

The history of the hippodrome in Constantinople starts with Septimius Severus, who seems to have made it part of his rebuilding of the city in around 200. It was probably completed by Constantine I, who built his residence, the Great Palace, alongside it (see [Map 43.1](#)). The hippodrome constructed by Severus and Constantine was a typical Roman circus of the period, with an elliptical shape and a track divided by a longitudinal barrier. The seating area reserved for the imperial family, the *Kathisma*, was on the east side, and hence was situated between the track and the Great Palace.⁵ The hippodrome was approximately 450 meters long and 118 meters wide and seems to have held about a hundred thousand people (Mango, Kazhdan, and Cutler 1991). (On the architecture of Roman circuses, see Dodge's essay in this volume on sites other than amphitheaters, Chapter 38.)

Map 43.1 Plan of Constantinople in the time of Justinian.



The hippodrome was in service for most of a millennium and for much of that time it represented one of the most important public spaces in Constantinople. The structure was maintained and remained in use until c.1200, and was not finally dismantled until the construction of the Blue Mosque in the seventeenth century. For a thousand years it served not only as a site for chariot racing, but also as the setting for major political events such as the proclamation of new emperors and the celebration of military triumphs. Its location in the physical heart of Constantinople reflected its role as a focus for public life in the city.

The fan clubs of the factions, especially of the Blues and Greens, form perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Byzantine chariot racing. The members of the factions are typically identified as “partisans” and were the most extreme and dedicated fans of the teams. It is important to note that the partisans were almost always few in number and represented not only an extremely small minority of the whole population, but also a small minority of racing fans generally, the majority of whom were not so radical (Cameron 1976: 74–5). Our

only figure for the size of these partisan groups comes from the historian Theophylact Simocatta, who records that in 602 there were 1,500 Green partisans and 900 Blue partisans in Constantinople (Theophylact *The History* 8.7.11). The partisans were the most rabid fans of their factions in the hippodrome, but they were also the loudest and rowdiest spectators in the theater. As they were the most dedicated and experienced fans, they were also the most skillful leaders of chants in support of their teams and favorite pantomimes (Cameron 1976: 74–156, 193–229).

Aside from their rabid interest in the theater and chariot races, it is important to emphasize that partisans had another thing in common: they were typically young men. The evidence for this is abundant throughout the sources. For example, the historian Agathias approves of Justinian's giving a young relative a military position in order to "prevent him from dissipating his energies and wasting his substance on wild escapades in the turbulent atmosphere of the Hippodrome with its chariot races and its popular factions, all of which things tend to have a profoundly disturbing effect on the minds of the young" (Agathias *The Histories* 5.21.4, trans. J. Frendo). Procopius and other historians frequently describe partisans merely as "youths" (*neanias*) (Procopius *Secret History* 7.42). We have personal evidence from one historian, Menander Protector, who confesses that after law school (in other words, when he was still a young man) he preferred "the disgraceful life of an idle layabout" and made his interests the chariot races and the pantomimes of the theater (Menander Fragment 1).

These young, rabid partisans of the Blue and Green factions identified with each other and wore clothing that deliberately set them apart from the typical Byzantine male and even from the other less rabid fans of the spectacles. They apparently wore baggy clothing with puffy sleeves and large cloaks so that their clothing would billow out and make a scene when they cheered in the theaters and hippodromes (Procopius *Secret History* 7.12–13). More than this, the partisans preferred to wear both their hair and their beards long in what contemporaries called the "Hunnic" style (Procopius *Secret History* 7.10). In the hair and dress of the partisans, and in the disapproving tone that contemporaries use to describe them, one is reminded of the critiques of the "long hairs" of the social revolution of the 1960s. So the partisans of the Blue and Green factions were rabid fans, typically young men, and set themselves apart in their appearance. But their most important and dangerous contribution to society in the minds of contemporaries was certainly their participation in large-scale riots.

3 Byzantine Riots

Of all the impacts of sport and spectacle in the Byzantine world of the sixth century, riots are perhaps the most frequently cited. There were two major types of riots that hippodrome and theater spectators in general, and the partisans of the Blues and Greens in particular, instigated. The first was a relatively straightforward battle between competing sets of partisans, such as the riot of November 561 described at the beginning of this essay. These disturbances typically took place in response to something that occurred in the hippodrome, such as a resounding victory for one of the major factions, or in the theater, such as a particularly successful act of a pantomime. For many riots these origins have to be assumed, as the sources often do not provide explicit cause for these faction battles. As Cameron has noted, “they were the natural escalation and culmination of faction rivalry, nothing more” (Cameron 1976: 275). These sorts of disturbances usually started inside the hippodrome or theater, often when games or shows were taking place. The importance of these two structures as the center of violence between the partisans of the Blues and Greens should not be underestimated – on occasion a riot between the factions might occur in the hippodrome even when no race was being held, as in Constantinople in April 550 (John Malalas *Chronographia* 484). Once a riot had begun, it frequently spilled out into the streets, as happened in 561 in the aforementioned incident.

The second major type of riot instigated by faction partisans involved them uniting, rather than attacking each other, and presenting demands to the imperial government. When these demands were not met, the united partisans would proceed to rampage through the city, killing indiscriminately and engaging in vandalism and arson. A riot could begin as this type of disturbance, or a general disturbance of the first type could turn into this kind of riot because of the actions of the government. For example, at Antioch in 507 the overreaction of a government official to a typical faction disturbance resulted in a full-scale war between the government and Green partisans that took many lives (John Malalas *Chronographia* 396–8). The demands made by rioting faction members were almost always related to their own fan clubs or to chariot racing in general. In 507, there was a serious riot in Constantinople when the Green partisans appealed to Anastasius during the chariot races to release prisoners who had been arrested for throwing stones. When Anastasius refused the request and sent in soldiers to attack the partisans, they proceeded to throw stones themselves at the soldiers and the emperor (John Malalas *Chronographia* 394–5). It is reasonable to assume that the imprisoned stone throwers who were the subject of the original request were

themselves Green partisans.

The Nika Riot of 532 is the most famous and best known of these types of disturbances because it is described in depth by several sources and was resolved by a massacre with an unusually high death toll.⁶ The riot began typically, with a request for the release of some fellow partisans who had managed to survive a botched execution. If there was something unusual about this request, it was that partisans of both the Blue and Green factions made the request, because it just happened that the surviving prisoners were one partisan from each faction. Although the riot started typically, it escalated quickly. The name given to the disturbance afterward was based on the chant *Nika* ("conquer!") that was taken up by the rioters, who rampaged through the city and burned down a number of important structures, including Hagia Sophia. After initial attempts at repression failed, the emperor Justinian took steps to conciliate the rioters, but to no avail, and disturbances continued. Justinian then endeavored to negotiate with the rioters from the *Kathisma* in the hippodrome, but the assembled crowd disdained his advances and instead acclaimed a new emperor. Justinian was reportedly on the verge of fleeing Constantinople when the empress Theodora intervened and urged him to remain and take forceful countermeasures. Justinian ordered government forces to mount an attack on the crowd in the hippodrome; this resulted in the death of approximately thirty thousand people and effectively crushed the riot. Thanks to the recent scholarship of Geoffrey Greatrex, we know that the Nika Riot had such a catastrophic conclusion because of a series of misunderstandings between the rioting people and Justinian. Greatrex argues that "Justinian constantly gave off different signals to the populace, at one moment seeming lenient, at another uncompromising" (Greatrex 1997: 80). Without this indecision from the emperor, it is likely that the Nika Riot would have been rather shorter than six days, and would not have ended so bloodily.

Riots started by the partisans of the Blues and Greens were fairly common in the sixth century. John Malalas recounts at least nine such disturbances in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian, making for an average of about one riot every four years. Despite the frequency of these riots and the occasionally appalling level of destruction, the emperors clearly tolerated them. This is evident from the fact that they never formally attempted to ban the Blue and Green factions nor ever permanently shut down either the hippodrome or the theater. While the emperors no doubt had many reasons for allowing the partisans to continue their activities, the primary reason was that they needed the partisans.

These young individuals, as we have seen, often prefaced their riots by making requests of the government. The emperors typically

ignored the requests since they tended to revolve around the release of partisans who had been convicted of crimes ranging from arson to murder. However, the fact that these partisans were able to voice requests in settings as large as the theater and hippodrome points to a relatively high level of organization. By coordinating their efforts and presenting their requests as simple short chants, the partisans could make their voices heard even in such large public arenas. As Cameron notes (1976: 234–7), the partisans did this in much the same way that clagues, small paid groups of professional spectators, directed the audience’s applause in more modern times at the opera.

Of course, the requests of the partisans for the release of their criminal compatriots did not help the emperor, but at other times when there were no such requests to make, the partisans used their abilities to direct the entire audience in the theater or hippodrome in a chant in acclamation of the emperor. For example, in 602 the emperor Maurice used heralds to address the crowd in the hippodrome and assure them that the revolt of Phocas was not serious. He then ordered a series of chariot races to amuse audience. The Blues responded by leading a chant in support of Maurice, assuring him that he would overcome his enemies (Theophylact *The History* 8.7.8–9). This sort of behavior on the part of the partisans was invaluable to the emperor because it could instantly boost his own popularity, or at least the appearance of it.⁷ This, combined with the fact that the majority of factional disturbances were directed against the opposing faction instead of against the government, explains why the emperor tolerated both the partisans and the riots that they regularly sparked.

4 The Conjunction of Spectacle and Riot

We have now assembled several facts about the culture of Byzantine sport and spectacle in the sixth century and it is time to propose an overarching interpretation that unifies them. Of primary interest are two related questions: why was rioting apparently a popular activity for faction partisans, and why were spectacle and riot so intimately linked? Of course, there were sometimes serious socioeconomic reasons to riot, ranging from famine to political uncertainty. A spectacle in the hippodrome or theater, and indeed a riot that might go along with it, could be an opportunity for the people, as Cameron says, “to leave behind for a few hours the dreary and oppressive

realities of their everyday lives” (1976: 294).

There is also a simpler explanation for the popularity of rioting, which probably supplemented and occasionally sublimated other reasons. Perhaps faction riots occurred at regular intervals and were popular because they represented a chance for the young men involved in them to engage in intense physical competition, which we might call sport. Organized personal athletic competition for the average individual was virtually nonexistent in the sixth-century Byzantine world. A riot provided an outlet where a young man could best an opponent in competition, either by pummeling him into submission in a fight or by successfully vandalizing more buildings than his fellows. In addition to this aspect of personal competition, a riot that generally pitted Blue partisans against Green partisans would provide a strong sense of camaraderie for the participants, allowing them to feel like part of a team. The opportunity for personal athletic achievement and team spirit – what more could one ask for in a sport?

This thesis has quite a bit of support in the sources. The authors of the period who provide the vast majority of our evidence are highly critical of the faction partisans and their activities, but in their critiques they conveniently reveal something of the motives of the partisans. As Procopius rather stuffily notes, “many young men now poured in to join the ranks of this team [The Blues], men who had never before shown an interest in its activities but were drawn to it now by the prospect of power and insolence coupled with impunity” (Procopius *Secret History* 7.23, trans. A. Kaldellis). For Procopius’s “power” and “insolence,” a more sympathetic author might have chosen “victory” and “competition.” Even the critics of the partisans understood some of the urges that underlay their violent actions in riots.

Procopius highlights the importance of competition in the violent activities of the partisans when he explains that while the Blues committed great crimes under Justinian, the most militant of the Greens were also “constantly busy with crimes,” in order to keep up with the Blues (Procopius *Secret History* 7.2–4). Agathias is also aware of the competition among partisans and especially between the two major faction colors. He scathingly remarks of the partisans that they were “men whose fanatical and headstrong daring confined itself to stirring up civil strife and to supporting one color against the other, but who in real emergencies were cowardly and effeminate” (Agathias *The Histories* 5.14.4, trans. J. Frendo). Thus the historian understood that the partisans wanted to pride themselves on their success in competition and their daring, but he refused to give them this recognition and instead mocked them for not being brave in a truly dangerous situation, by which he presumably means actual war.

The most interesting evidence for the desire of athletic competition and camaraderie among the rioting partisans comes from our sole source who admits that he used to belong to their number. The historian Menander has already been mentioned, but it is worthwhile to quote in full his description of his former life: "I therefore neglected my career for the disgraceful life of an idle layabout. My interests were the gang fights of the colors, the chariot-races and the pantomimes, and I even entered the wrestling ring. I sailed with such folly that I not only lost my shirt, but also my good sense and all my decency" (Menander Fragment 1, trans. R. Blockley). As befits a more mature man who now has a career and is expected to be above the rambunctious life of a partisan, Menander begins by making clear that his former life was disgraceful. His list of interests is, however, quite revealing about the mindset of the young men who were the partisans in his day. The very first interest he lists is the gang fights of the colors, which says something about the perceived importance of the violence in the riots. Not only does he emphasize the violence, but he is careful to mention the camaraderie of being in a "gang" at the same time. His fascination with the chariot races and the pantomimes is of course nothing unusual as many Byzantines who were not faction partisans were quite obsessed with the spectacles of the hippodrome and theater. Finally, Menander confesses to wrestling, one of our few references to the sport in all of the sixth century. That he mentions a passion for wrestling again suggests an interest in personal physical competition that was no doubt also expressed in the "gang fights of the colors."

If it is accepted that the young men who were the partisans of the Blue and Green factions instigated some riots because of desire for sport and camaraderie, then it becomes easy to explain why the riots were so closely linked to the spectacles of the theater and hippodrome.⁸ These spectacles provided the event and location where people could gather together. Once they had arrived and witnessed the pantomimes performing in the theater or the chariots racing in the hippodrome, the most rabid fans, the young partisans of each faction, were driven almost to hysteria by the excitement of the spectacle. As Cameron has noted, the chariot races became extremely important to spectators in the way that critical soccer games bring out passionate spectators in the modern world (Cameron 1976: 293–4). It is not hard to imagine that this passion, when combined with the fact that the spectators had just witnessed a physical competition in the hippodrome, might drive them to triumphantly seek sport themselves. With little in the way of organized outlets for this desire, and with the high emotion that comes with passionate engagement with a spectacle, it is not surprising that the situation often exploded into a

fight between the partisans (the most passionate fans) that could then easily ignite a riot. Indeed, this is exactly how the November 561 faction riot in Constantinople unfolded. In the excitement of the spectacle of the chariot races, the Green partisans attacked the Blues, the Blues invaded the seats of the Greens, and when the emperor tried to separate the warring factions with his guards, the fight exploded into a general riot that spread throughout the city (Theophanes *Chronographia* 235–6).

5 Conclusion

In the sixth-century Byzantine Empire, spectacle, sport, riot, chanting, and government were all intimately linked. As we have seen, sometime in the late fifth century the imperial government assumed both ownership and administration of the public spectacles of the theater and hippodrome. The success of the rowdiest partisans of the Blues and Greens in leading chants in both hippodromes and theaters led, in the sixth century, to their co-optation as well. The emperors simply could not pass up the chance to utilize these skills that could, when put to the right uses, strengthen and reaffirm their popularity.

By using the partisans to chant for them, however, the emperors were obliged to turn something of a blind eye to their more mischievous side. These partisans, being young men who, at least according to Menander, did not have much better to do, were not only rabid fans of the theater and hippodrome, but also had a strong passion to participate in sport themselves. On many occasions the outlet they chose for this passion was rioting. The disturbance of a riot allowed them to engage in direct physical competition with other young men, and fighting with other partisans of their color provided a sense of team camaraderie. The emperors tolerated this behavior as long as the partisans were mostly interested in fighting each other and only found this to be a serious issue when they united to riot against the government. While there were many reasons to riot, from religious complaints to economic and political issues, the fascination of the young fans of chariot racing with sport and competition should not be discarded as a contributing factor in many riots of the period.

After the sixth century chariot racing declined in the Byzantine world generally, in large part because it had become intimately connected to government finances. The Byzantine government experienced significant setbacks in the seventh century with the Persian War and the subsequent Arab invasions. The resulting financial difficulties probably led to the disappearance of racing in

provincial cities, which we cease to hear about in the seventh century. However, chariot racing and the racing factions of the colors definitely survived in Constantinople in diminished form until at least the twelfth century (Cameron 1976: 308). No doubt the imperial government made this a priority because of the opportunity the races provided for the emperor to speak directly to the people and for the people to acclaim the emperor and his policies. Even so, in the twelfth century the Comnenian emperors moved to the palace at Blachernae, farther away from the hippodrome, and, being increasingly influenced by the West, they turned to more distinctly medieval entertainments such as jousts. Thus the final decline of the spectacle of chariot racing in the Byzantine world may be traced to a gradual change of tastes in the High Medieval period. By this time the exuberant faction riots of the sixth century had long since faded away, but for a time in their heyday they had provided an important outlet, not just for economic, political, or religious pressures, but also for the passion for spectacle and sport.

NOTES

1 All dates are CE unless otherwise indicated.

2 On Byzantine individual sports, for which we are much more poorly informed than the public spectacles discussed in this essay, see Ducellier 1980 and Karpozilos and Cutler 1991. The relevant sources are discussed in detail in Koukoules 1948–57: vol. 3: 81–147.

3 On the decline of Greek athletics, see Kyle 2007: 345–6 as well as Downey 1939; Weiler 2004; and Winter 1998. On the decline of the spectacles associated with the Roman arena (gladiatorial combats and beast hunts), see Dunkle 2008: 201–6, 241–4 and Roueché 2008 as well as Cameron 1973: 22–30; 1976: 215–18; Ville 1960; and Wiedemann 1992: 128–64.

4 The most popular racing teams of the sixth century were the Blues and Greens, and this was apparently a tradition that stretched back to the Early Imperial period (31 BCE–476 CE). The Whites and Reds were secondary or minor teams, which were managed by and usually paired with the Blues and Greens, respectively. While the Whites and Reds had some adherents, these fans were very much in the minority. See Cameron 1976: 50–6.

5 The *Kathisma* was connected to the Great Palace by a spiral staircase, access to which was controlled by bronze doors that could be securely bolted. This feature was employed during the Nika Riot

of 532 to prevent rioters from gaining access to the palace.

6 The key primary sources for the Nika Riot are John Malalas 473–6; Procopius *History of the Wars* 1.24.7–54; *Chronicon Paschale* 620–9; and Marcellinus Comes a.532. The best modern account of the Nika Riot is Greatrex 1997. For a brief overview of the event, see Kaegi 1991.

7 In fact, the role of the faction partisans in cheering the emperor became increasingly formalized into imperial ceremony in the seventh century and beyond. Green and Blue partisans continued to lead formal acclamations of the emperors throughout the middle Byzantine period. See McCormick 1986: 220–7.

8 Of course, it would be a dramatic oversimplification to say that all Byzantine riots started for the simple joy of the competition and sport inherent in the act of rioting. The Byzantines of the sixth century rioted for all sorts of reasons that had little to do with sport. There were very serious ecclesiastical riots in the reign of Anastasius, for instance in 512 when a crowd rampaged around Constantinople to protest the emperor's religious policy (Greatrex 1997: 62). However, some riots, especially those connected to the Blue and Green factions, probably had young men's desire for competition as their catalyst, and even riots that started for other reasons might be joined by these young men who loved rioting for its own sake.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The essays collected in Jeffreys 2008: 232–94 offer a compact overview of the political history of the Byzantine Empire. For a longer, general guide to Byzantine history that puts together the whole period in accessible format, see Treadgold 1997. The still authoritative work of Jones 1964 offers a detailed analysis of Byzantine government and society in the sixth century. The essays collected in Maas 2005 survey the Byzantine world in the time of Justinian.

For a brief introduction to the written sources for Byzantine history, see Haarer 2010. On Procopius in particular, see Kaldellis 2004 and his recent edition of the *Secret History* (2010). On Byzantine archaeology, see Crow 2008 or Crow 2010. The articles collected in Jeffreys 2008 provide an overview of and introduction to scholarly study of the Byzantine world.

There is no current book-length study of Byzantine sport and spectacle, but brief surveys can be found Mango 1981; Roueché 2008; and Tougher 2010. Puchner 2002 is a good introduction to Byzantine theater; for a book-length study see Webb 2008.

For a very brief survey of the urban development of Constantinople, see Mango 1991. There is an array of longer works on that same subject, including Bassett 2004; Guiland 1969; Dagron 1984; Magdalino 2007 and 2010; and Mango 1985. Croke 2005 and Holum 2005 focus specifically on Constantinople in the time of Justinian. Basic information on the hippodrome in Constantinople can be found in Mango, Kazhdan, and Cutler 1991. For more detailed work on that same subject, see Dagron 1984: 320–47 and Guiland 1969: vol. 1: 369–595. The standard study of Roman circuses remains Humphrey 1986, which, however, does not discuss Constantinople in any detail.

For years there was a substantial bibliography on the Blues and Greens of the hippodromes that sought to cast them in the role of popular dissenters against Byzantine government. Cameron 1976 fully refuted the previous hypotheses of generations of historians and showed that the Blue and Green partisans were above all passionate sports fans, and his work on the subject remains essential. For a more specific review of the popularity of charioteers, especially Porphyrius, the greatest of all the charioteers of the sixth century, see Cameron 1973. On the history and logistics of chariot racing in the Roman world before the fourth century CE, see Chapter 33.

Kaegi 1991 gives basic information about the Nika Riot. The best modern treatment of that event is Greatrex 1997, and his article is

also useful for understanding riots and disturbances in the sixth century more generally. There has been a great deal of modern scholarship on the causes of violence among sport spectators. A good introduction to that scholarship can be found in Young 2000. On the relationship between emperor and populace as played out in the hippodrome, see Cameron 1976: 157–92.

These secondary works are more than enough to provide an introduction to the topic, after which primary sources may be more profitably read to gain direct understanding of spectacle, sport, and riot in the Byzantine world. See especially John Malalas, in convenient English translation in Jeffreys, Jeffreys, Scott, *et al.* 1986; Marcellinus Comes, translation by Croke 1995; and Menander Protector, translation by Blockley 1985.

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- supports athletic contests for females

slaves, involvement in sport

social capital

social history of ancient sport

social status, sport as source of

social status of athletes

- see also* Greek sport in Rome

- Etruscan world, *see* Etruscans

- Greek world

social status of performers in spectacle

socialization through sport

Solon

- figure in Lucian's *Anacharsis*

- institutes political reforms

- institutes rewards for Athenian athletic victors

sophists at athletic festivals

Spain

Sparta

- banned from Olympia

- females involved in sport

- role in invention of athletic nudity

spectacle

- see also* Romanization through spectacle

- Byzantine, *see* Byzantine spectacle

- contrasted with sport

- criticism of

- definition of

- effects on spectators

- elite financing of

- entertaining

- literary representations of

- moral exemplars in

- popularity of

- secularization of

- support personnel

- types in Rome

spectators

- effects of sport and spectacle on

- female

- numbers of

- participants in spectacle

- protective measures for

- provisions for

- seating arrangements

sphairomachia (Spartan ball game)

spondophoroi

- definition of

sport

- compared or contrasted with spectacle

- criticisms of

- definition of

- entertaining

- popularity of

- Roman world, *see* Greek sport in Rome

- vs sports (definitional difference)

sport history, of the ancient world, development of

stadion (foot race)

stadion (measure of distance)

stadium/stadia

- see also* *hysplex*

- built in Roman period

- civic

- Delphi

- design of

- Isthmia

- lengths of

- modified to serve as amphitheaters

- Mount Lykaion

- Naples

- Nemea

- Olympia

- Perge

- Puteoli

- rare in western Roman empire

- Rome

- seating

- temporary versions in Rome

- western part of Roman empire

stadium of Domitian

stagnum (artificial lake)

see also naumachia/naumachiae

Augustus

Circus Flaminius

Colosseum

Domitian

Julius Caesar

terminology

theaters, in

Titus

Trajan

Statius

statues, victor

stephanitic games, definition of

Stoics, *see* critics of spectacle

strigil

definition of

support personnel for spectacles

swimming races (absence of)

synoris (two-horse chariot race)

see also Greek *under* chariot racing

Syracuse, *see* Deinomenids

Tacitus

Taras

Tarquinia

see also Etruscans

Tarraco

Termessos

tethrippon (four-horse chariot race)

see also Greek *under* chariot racing

Theagenes of Thasos

theaters

added to *gymnasia*

Aigai

Athens

awnings in

combined with amphitheater

Delphi

Demetrias

Dion

- Etruscan structures
- Isthmia
- lacking at Olympia
- lex Iulia theatralis*
- modified to serve as amphitheaters
- Nikopolis
- Ostia
- Paphos
- Rome
- seating in Rome
- Stobi
- themides*, definition of
 - see also* chrematitic games
- Theodora
- theoroi*, definition of
- Thera, *see* Akrotiri
- time* (honor)
- Titus (emperor)
 - dedicates Colosseum
 - floods Colosseum
 - punishes Jews for revolting
 - stages beast hunts
 - stages *naumachiae*
 - stages public executions
 - stages spectacle involving females
- Tomb of Poggio al Moro at Chiusi
- Tomb of Storax in Pompeii
- Tomb of the Augurs at Tarquinia
- Tomb of the Chariots at Tarquinia
- Tomb of the Inscriptions at Tarquinia
- Tomb of the Master of Olympiads at Tarquinia
- Tomb of the Monkey at Chiusi
- Tomb of the Olympics at Tarquinia
- Tomb of Vestorius Priscus at Pompeii
- tombs, Roman
 - depicting spectacle
 - spectacle performers
- torch races
- trainers, athletic
 - see also* *paidotribes/paidotribai*
- training

- subsidizing of
- treasuries
 - see also* Delphi; Olympia
- tripods
- triumphs, Roman
- truces for athletic contests
 - see also* truce *under* Olympics, ancient
- tunnels in stadia
- tyrants
- umpires, *see Hellanodikai*; officials
- vase painting
- Veii
- vela/velaria* (awnings), *see* amphitheaters
- venatio/venationes*, *see* beast hunts staged by Romans
- venator/venatores* (hunters in *venationes*)
 - depictions of
 - female
 - physicians for
 - training of
- venues for spectacle
 - see also* amphitheater, circuses
- venues for sport
 - see also* *gymnasion/gymnasia*, *palaistra/palaistrai*, stadium/stadia
- Verona
- victor statues, *see* statues, victor
- victors, depictions of
- victors, Olympic
 - females
 - heroization of
 - hippic
 - Ptolemaic Egypt
 - religious status of
 - social status of
 - see also* social status of athletes
- violence, allure of
- vivaria* (animal enclosures)
- wreaths
- wrestling
- Xenophanes
- xystarch

Zanes (statues at Olympia)

zeugos (type of equid race)

Zliten mosaic